



South of Cape Horn

a saga of Nat Palmer and early Antarctic exploration

written and illustrated by

ARMSTRONG SPERRY



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*Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.*

—BYRON. *Childe Harold*

Other Winston Books by the Author

DANGER TO WINDWARD

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RIVER OF THE WEST

STORM CANVAS

about the author

ARMSTRONG SPERRY, one of the outstanding historical novelists for young people in the United States, is the unusual combination of imaginative artist and gifted writer. His impressive number of published works has brought him many honors—including the coveted John Newbery Award for *Call It Courage*.

Mr. Sperry was raised among the rocky hills of Connecticut, within sight of the Atlantic Ocean. It may have been the nearness of the ocean which aroused in him dreams of pirates, adventure, and faraway lands. These daydreams later emerged as stories and drawings. He cannot remember when he began to write and draw, but both forms of expression filled his earliest childhood and continued through his schooldays.

Art, though, held sway when the time arrived to prepare for a career. Mr. Sperry's initial formal training in this field was at Yale Art School, but this pursuit was interrupted by World War I and his service in

the Navy. After the war, he attended the Art Student's League for three years and spent a magical winter in Paris. Then, feeling equipped to face the business world, the new artist secured a position with an advertising agency.

Over the span of two years, Mr. Sperry absorbed much about advertising, but a chance reading of a book on the South Seas effected a dramatic change in his life. All his boyhood fancies of ships and pirates and savages were rekindled. Consequently, a few months later, he found himself on a copra schooner that was sailing from Tahiti to Borabora, one of the Society Islands in French Oceania. At Borabora, he lived in a bamboo house near a lagoon, but went forth frequently to explore the surrounding islands. During these journeys, he learned about the peoples, their legends and music. This knowledge formed the basis for some of his most enchanting books.

Since Mr. Sperry is descended from a long line of sea captains, it is natural that many of his novels should have as their theme the sea and the courageous men who followed it. *SOUTH OF CAPE HORN* is the latest of his stories with a nautical flavor.

The inspiration for *SOUTH OF CAPE HORN* came in a roundabout fashion. The author was reading about the International Geophysical Year for 1957-58 and the Antarctic expeditions planned in conjunction with it, when he realized he had no idea who discovered that icy continent. Thus began an extensive search into the life of Nathaniel Brown Palmer, the man believed

by many to be the first to have discovered the Antarctic Continent. Historians may someday disprove this particular claim, but, nonetheless, the actual feats accomplished by Nat Palmer were so incredible, Mr. Sperry felt compelled to write the story of this almost-forgotten American sea captain.

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chapter 1

THE LOST AURORAS

LIKE MOST MEN of action, young Nat Palmer was sparing of words. Entries in the log of his sloop *Hero* were sparse and to the point—often bare statements of wind and tide; for the man who penned them grudged the time required to write up a log when there was work aloft to be done. And sailing the world's most dangerous waters, in a 47-foot sloop with a crew of four, there was always work aloft to be done. The following entry in the *Hero's* log is characteristic of young Nat Palmer:

November 18, 1820. Discovered a strait trending SSW filled with ice. Thought it imprudent to venture in.

Bore away to Northard. Saw the shore everywhere perpendicular.

Those brief words describe the discovery of a continent—the world's last great land mass. Many years later that “perpendicular” shore would be marked on maps of Antarctica as “Palmer Land.” A twenty-one-year-old youth had stepped into immortality. But Nat never suspected the magnitude of his discovery. Besides, he was looking for seals, not continents; for seal oil, not glory.

For over two hundred years before this youthful seafarer appeared on the scene, men had been actively searching for land in far southern latitudes. The ancient Greeks and Romans had pondered the existence of a *Terra Australis* at the bottom of the world. The Dutch explorer Dirck Gherritz, rounding Cape Horn in 1599, believed he caught a glimpse of land. Blinding sleet and fog made further investigation impossible; but he named this elusive landfall the “Lost Auroras.”

In 1771, the Frenchmen Bouvet and Kerguelen had been similarly allured, only to be baffled by adverse winds. Captain James Cook—England's greatest navigator—carried on the search during three perilous years. Crossing the Antarctic Circle for the first time in history, Cook sailed as far south as $71^{\circ} 10'$ —farther than any navigator before him had ventured. But at that point a limitless expanse of ice blocked further progress, convincing the Englishman that if land did

exist in such latitudes, it would be uninhabitable for man.

When scarcely out of his teens, it remained for young Nat Palmer to succeed where older and more experienced navigators had failed. The four members of the *Hero*'s crew were scarcely older than the captain himself—three in their early twenties, the fourth a boy of fifteen. The cruise of the 47-foot sloop from Stonington, Connecticut, to Antarctica—a distance of more than 30,000 sailing miles—is a record of daring and nautical skill almost without parallel in the history of seafaring.

But Nat's story begins, properly, with his home port. In the latter half of the 18th century, Stonington was a hive of activity. A finger of land standing at the mouth of Long Island Sound, it offered fair haven to any ships scurrying for safety from northeast storms off Point Judith or Block Island. Stonington's shipyards hummed with the trade in building and repair.

In this small New England seaport, on the 8th of August, 1799, Nathaniel Brown Palmer first saw the light of day. It is said that before he was one hour old his father, Big Nat, carried the newborn infant to an open window and thrust him out to face an ocean-wandering wind. The babe opened its mouth to cry, gulped in half a gale of wind and crowed with delight instead.

Triumphantly the man turned to his wife. "Scuttle

me!" he exulted, in his quarter-deck voice, "the salt sea is in this one's blood, too! Now he's got the smell of it in his lungs."

"Nat, bring that baby back to me," the mother protested, wanly. "You'll be the death of him—"

The man's laughter filled the room. "Mark ye, Mercy Palmer, he's even got the sea in his eyes. I take my oath—they're blue as the Caribbean."

Big Nat's words were less a statement of fact than a prophecy of events to come. For the babe, growing into a little boy, was drawn to the sea as inexorably as a steel filing is attracted to a magnet. Every time the mother turned her back, the child disappeared. But Mercy Palmer always knew where little Nat could be found: in his father's shipyard. And so the woman sighed, knowing that someday one more man in the Palmer family would be gone from home for months, even for years, at a time. Already three older sons had shipped before the mast. Where were they now? Only God knew the answer. As for her four young daughters—as night follows day it followed that the Palmer girls would marry men of the sea and know the empty loneliness of waiting. . . .

For a boy, what playground could be more exciting than a shipyard? From the shores of Stonington, a boy sniffed winds that blew unhampered from beyond the coasts of Africa. From earliest memory, little Nat's ears were filled with the clatter of mauls striking live-oak timber, with the whir and whine of whipsaws, with the hiss of steam as blacksmiths plunged white-

hot iron into the great water butts. In the Palmer yard, under his father's tutelage, the boy began to absorb a knowledge of ships long before he went to school to learn his letters. He saw how ships grew. First, the idea in one man's mind. Then the lift model. Then the mechanical drawings that were transferred into gaunt timbers of oak and pine and rock maple. And finally the noble hull of a ship, sliding down greased ways and so into the sea.

Then, too, in Stonington were the wharves, where ships of all rigs tied up to disgorge one cargo and take on another—ships and men from the world's farthest reaches. Little Nat listened, wide-eyed, to the singsong lingo of Malays and Lascars, to the slurred Spanish syllables of men who (it was whispered) had sailed under the skull and crossed bones of the Jolly Roger. British sailors with tarred hats and pigtails, prideful King's officers in broadcloth and gold, swaggered down the cobbled streets of Stonington.

But most of all, little Nat loved to watch the broad-beamed whaleships warping up to anchorage—their hulls battered by the gales and ice of the far southern ocean, decks reeking of rancid oil and blubber. He never tired of listening to the tales of the harpooners—those steady-eyed fellows who had stared into the gaping jaws of Moby Dick, plunged home their lances, and lived to tell the tale.

At this time, little Nat's two particular cronies were Phineas Wilcox and Dick Loper. The boys had been born within a stone's throw of one another. Dick

Loper's uncle—Capt. Edmund Fanning—had gained fame and fortune as the first American sea captain to sail his ship around the world. In a reflection of glory, this feat lent Dick a special standing with his two friends.

By the time they were seven or eight, Nat and his playmates could handle a sailboat with ease and skill, often venturing as far out as the Middle Ground. A year or so later, what could be more fun than laying a course for Fisher's Island, with no grownups aboard to tell them when to make sail or when to take soundings? And that never-to-be-forgotten time when the three of them sailed Uncle Alex Palmer's sloop *Spindrift* from New York to Providence, each taking turns at the tiller and handling all sail. On that day they joined the ranks of deep-sea sailors, bound together by some mystic salt-water rite. The *Spindrift* soon became their particular training ship. Uncle Alex was a stern master and hard to please.

By the time the boys were eleven or twelve, their firmest "outside" friend was Zenas Coffin. What the old man's age may have been no one knew, but he was always referred to as Old Zenas—the adjective reaching back into far time. In his younger days Zenas had roved the seven seas, until an encounter with a killer whale robbed him of one leg. With a peg leg made from the spiraled tusk of a narwhal, Zenas lacked the agility necessary for a foremasthand. Thereafter he turned his back on the sea and picked up a living by carving

scrimshaw—knickknacks of bone or ivory or wood. In recent years, Nat's father had commissioned the old man to carve figureheads for the Palmer ships.

With this task, the boys—growing rapidly these days—often found their old friend occupied. Zenas never allowed work to interfere with conversation. The boys soon came to know by heart all the old man's anecdotes, and it was a simple matter to insert a word that suggested a new yarn as the one being told drew to a close. What tales they were! Mutiny in the Sulu Sea, a captain swinging from a yardarm. Slave runners plying their evil trade between the Ivory Coast and the South American market. Cannibal kings and pearl-filled lagoons, palm trees as green as the heart of an emerald! Once Nat had overheard his mother refer to Zenas as "that tiresome old man." But to the three boys, listening so eagerly, he was a fount of wisdom—a barnacled old sea-god who held winds and storms in answer to his command.

The shed where the old man lived and worked was perched on a shoulder of rock overlooking the harbor. Its weathered-shingle roof served as a rookery for sea gulls. Across its small-paned windows, generations of spiders had spun a film. But the shed's shadows were filled with all manner of exciting things: the prow of a South Sea canoe carved from ironwood; a sperm whale's lower jawbone; a Fijian war club which, Zenas claimed, had sent to glory more than a baker's dozen of missionaries.

On this particular afternoon, the old man scarcely

glanced up as the three boys climbed the rocky path to his shed. With a gouging chisel and mallet, Old Zenas was chipping away at a great block of elm which, presently, would take on the likeness of a mermaid. For an awed moment the young visitors watched in silence. It seemed incredible that what once had been the trunk of a tree should assume before their eyes the contours of a body, half human, half fish.

Then Nat, blue eyes dancing, broke the spell. "Zenas!" he exclaimed. "What do you s'pose? Last week we sailed Uncle Alex's sloop from New York to Providence. Handled her all the way by ourselves."

"I warped her to anchorage," Phineas boasted.

"But *I* heaved the lead," Dick Loper reminded him. "Without me, you'd have beached her high and dry."

"H'mph!" Old Zenas snorted, spilling the wind from the boys' sails. "Ye think from that great voyage ye've seen the whole world, don't ye? Ho! One man's lifetime ain't long enough fer to see it all." Mallet and chisel underscored the old man's words. "But I've seen more o' this world and its oceans than most men, mateys, and ye can lay to that."

Dick Loper's freckled face beamed with admiration. "Tell us, Zenas," he demanded eagerly, "what was the most wondrous of all the things you've seen? The pearl islands, p'raps? Or was it the Feejee cannibals, or the—"

The old man shook his head. "'Twarn't none o' 'em trifles," he snorted. "'Twas the waters south o' Cape Horn—beyond the Falklands. That's most wondrous o'

all! Whales o' every draught and rig ye'll find there—humpbacks, spermaceti, bowheads and sulphur-bottoms—thicker than barnacles on a shark's belly."

"But those waters have been fished out," Nat Palmer protested. "Everybody says so. Whalers are returning with casks half empty. Sealers come home in ballast, with naught but frostbite to show for a year's work."

"Gammon!" barked Old Zenas testily. "Nowadays whalers turn back too soon. They run fer cover from a forty-point gale like fish-chowder sailors afeered to git their feet wet. To hear 'em talk ye'd think the Falklands were the end o' the world, and nothin' existed beyond. Let 'em sail *south* from the Falklands, I say, and keep sailin' sou' by west. As sure as sharks eat little minnows they'll raise land in that region. And where's there's land, there's seals."

"How can you be so sure?" demanded Phineas Wilcox, on a note of patronage. "My father's ships have taken more seals than any others in Stonington. He says those waters are fished out, and if anybody ought to know, it's *him!*"

"Looky here, ye young blatherskite," snapped the old Triton of the sea, "I don't need to be told that yer pa has laid up a fortune in sealskins and oil. But I've wrung more salt water out o' my socks than ever he sailed in, and ye can lay to that! In *my* sealin' days we didn't stop at the Falklands longer than it took to fill up the water casks. We cracked on sail to make South Georgia before winter set in. And there I saw icebergs as big as mountains tackin' on the southwest gales. In

my belief, such masses o' ice are broken off from lands o' great extent. Find those lands and ye'll find seals—more skins than a thousand ships could ever carry home. Had I the money to outfit a vessel, m'lads, I'd stuff the words I'm tellin' ye down yer little throats!"

"And if you had a ship, Zenas, would you be taking us with you?" Nat demanded, flexing his eleven-year-old biceps. "Where could you sign on three better forem'sthands than me and Dick and Phineas?"

"Aye, I'd sign ye all, me buckos," the old man chuckled. "You, Dick Loper, fer mate—because yer Uncle Ed Fanning was the first American to have the gumption to take his own ship around the world, and mebbe ye've got some o' that spunk in ye, too."

"How about me?" Phineas demanded.

"And me?" Nat piped up.

"We-e-l-l, ye're both good men," Zenas conceded, "but ye'd have to draw lots fer berths." Suddenly the old sailor looked up, a faraway light kindling his faded eyes. "We'd lay a course fer the Falklands, mateys, straight as the albatross flies. And from there, sou' by west we'd sail fer the Lost Auroras—"

"Lost Auroras?" three voices demanded as one.
"Whatever are they?"

"That's the name sailors give to the southernmost land no man has ever seen," came the answer. "But land's there, scuttle me if it ain't! And Lost Auroras is as good a name fer it as any."

Old Zenas shifted his quid; the hollow curve of the chisel chipped a sliver of elm off the mermaid's nose.

"Ho, me beauty!" he gloated. "'Tis a fine Roman nose I'm givin' ye!" Then at the boys he barked brusquely: "Up anchor, me hearties! Lay a course fer home now, or yer mothers will be after me with a marlinespike. And see that ye make a straight wake! Oh, and that box by the door holds a wee bit o' sea pie—a wedge fer each o' ye. Raisins in it this time, and nuts, too, as thick as islands in the Great South Sea. Easy now, easy, lads. Leave a crumb fer a pore old sailor who still has appetite enough fer two."

All the way home, Nat Palmer and Dick Loper glowed with the excitement of Old Zenas' words. It seemed almost as if they were standing on the decks of a Yankee sealer, plunging into the wild gray waters south of Cape Horn. *Were* there lands to the southwest that no man ever had laid eye on? If Zenas was so sure, why had Captain Cook turned back? Why hadn't Cook sailed on and on, to find that wondrous continent men still imagined must exist? The very thought left Nat breathless.

Phineas Wilcox, however, being almost a year older than his companions, was more matter-of-fact. "My father says Old Zenas is as full of wind as an elephant seal," the boy declared. "Perhaps we shouldn't believe everything he tells us."

But Nat was still lost in dreams, open-eyed. In mind's eye he could see those gray, storm-tossed waters south of the battered Falklands. . . . There, glittering icebergs emerged for an instant from the fog, to disappear as

mysteriously as ghosts. There, pods of whales heaved their varnished hulks to the surface to toss a jet of mist high into the chill air. There resounded the hoarse clamor of millions of fur seals resting on wind-swept shores, beyond reach for the moment of the icy black waters which were their true element. The Lost Auroras. . . .

"That's what Uncle Ed Fanning says, too," Dick Loper chimed in. "He claims Old Zenas is worse than Aeolus: *you* know—the sea-god who blows wind from every point of the compass. But I like the old buzzard just the same. He's much more fun than Uncle Ed Fanning."

That night, Mercy Palmer stirred uneasily in sleep. A northeast storm was making, and the nearby boom of surf became the disturbing stuff of which bad dreams are made. Suddenly the woman found herself wide awake. In an adjoining room, her small son was muttering as in a nightmare.

Bless me, the mother thought, alarmed. I pray the child's not coming down with a distemper—

She hurried to the boy's bedside. In the glow of her candle, Nat's eyelids were tightly closed in sleep. One sturdy fist clutched the model of a boat he himself had carved—a sloop, just like Uncle Alex's *Spindrift*. The woman's heart tightened. The youngest of her four sons. . . . Where were the others now? One day, all too soon, this boy would be grown up and gone.

And as the woman bent to tuck the covers closer, she heard Nat's small voice muttering: "The Lost . . . Auroras. . . ."

Mercy Palmer laid a hand against a cheek that was reassuringly cool. "Heavens," she murmured, "what's got into the boy? Lost Auroras. . . . I'll wager Zenas has been putting notions into his head again. Oh, that tiresome old man!"



chapter 2

YOUNG BLOCKADE RUNNERS

FOR MANY MONTHS the shadow of war had been lengthening over the American colonies. England, drained of men by a costly struggle against Napoleon, was in desperate straits for sailors to man the Royal Navy. With increasing frequency her frigates and sloops of war halted American ships on the high seas, impressed American seamen into the service of the British Crown. With Napoleon preparing to invade England itself, many an English naval commander seized as many sailors as he could, giving necessity as his excuse and reason.

In an effort to force the warring countries of Europe to deal justly with young America, the Federal Govern-

ment had placed an embargo on American shipping. Bitterness ran high in New England against what was considered the muddleheadedness of the men who made laws in Washington. Young Nat Palmer watched the dismantling of ships in Stonington Harbor. He heard tell of seamen who were forced to beg their bread on the streets of New York and Baltimore. His father's shipyard, like all others along the coast, lay silent. Carpenters, riggers, sailmakers, coppersmiths, ship chandlers—all found themselves without means of livelihood. It was as if, almost overnight, some terrible blight had stricken the land.

But New Englanders were a stubborn breed. They knew that without trade they would starve to death, and this they had no intention of doing. War or no war, their ships would carry on commerce between New York and Providence, between Boston and New London, and let the devil take the hindmost!

When war finally was declared, on June 18, 1812, Nat Palmer was thirteen years old—of an age to share in the excitement that swept the New England coast, as wildfire sweeps through a field of dry cane. A war squadron, commanded by Sir Thomas Hardy, was sent to blockade the eastern end of Long Island Sound. Hardy's warships plied back and forth between Montauk and Point Judith, always within view of Stonington if the weather were clear—a constant irritant to its citizens. A second British squadron dropped anchor off Sandy Hook, slamming the door of New York Port in President Madison's face.

The men and boys of New England's coastal ports saw in the blockade a challenge that called for one answer: defiance. Besides, the profits to be earned from successfully running the blockade were high. Danger merely added zest to the adventure. In New York, flour was selling at \$7 a barrel. In Boston the price soared to \$14—a state of affairs which no Yankee in his right mind was prepared to ignore.

Uncle Alex Palmer promptly loaded his sloop *Spin-drift* with five hundred barrels of flour. For a crew he chose three veterans of coastal waters: Nat Palmer, Dick Loper, and Phineas Wilcox. His bo'sun was a young Negro from Philadelphia, Peter Harvey, by name: a splendid seaman. The man had grounded these boys firmly in seamanship, and he knew their capabilities. He knew also the risk he ran, and he was prepared to face it. Cleverly, he and his youthful crew outwitted the warships that chased them in hot pursuit; and when in Providence he sold his cargo, it was for a net profit of \$4,000. No one thought it remarkable that thirteen-year-old boys should have been pressed into service as blockade runners.

American skippers held one tremendous advantage over the vastly superior forces of the British: they were as familiar with the coasts of Long Island Sound as they were with the streets of their own home villages. Buoys, that once had marked hidden reefs, had been removed at the onset of war. All lighthouses had been destroyed. Men who had sailed these waters since childhood could use the lead line, in pitch-darkness or

heaviest fog, to learn exactly where they were; for most of the shoals carried their own distinctive features. Some were of pure-white sand, others were mixed dark with white, while still others were distinguishable by bits of broken shell. An experienced skipper could tell at a glance which part of the coast he was navigating.

But sometimes in the sound, the heaviest fogs had a disconcerting way of clearing unexpectedly. At one such unlucky moment, the *Spindrift* found herself caught off Point Judith—a circumstance that threatened to bring the short career of the young blockade runners to a speedy end. The fog cleared to reveal a British frigate romping down upon the sloop—guns run out and all hands at battle stations. Uncle Alex barked orders thick and fast. The three boys knew exactly what was expected of them. Every rag of canvas was set and sluiced down with water to increase the sloop's speed. While the *Spindrift* fled for cover like a fox with the hounds at its heels, the enemy guns belched flame and round shot; and the citizens of Stonington, lining the shores and wharves, watched the one-sided encounter and cheered themselves hoarse.

The fleeing *Spindrift*, with top hamper trailing, fluttered into port like a wing-clipped gull; but the enemy frigate, thwarted of her prize, dared not enter into those shallow, unmarked waters.

Thus, at the ripe age of thirteen, Nat Palmer polished up a seamanship which, a bare six years later, would lead him to brilliant achievement in another ocean. He, in common with other boys from Stonington, was

trained to handle the tiller in all weathers—trained by men whose skill even the enemy came grudgingly to concede. In the smartest breeze, Nat could jibe the main boom over without bringing enough strain on sheet or masthead to break a rope yarn. In fair wind or howling squall, he stood his trick at the *Spindrift*'s tiller, noting the influence of tidal currents, of veering winds that boxed the compass, keeping watch of the particular sand or shell brought up by the leadsman.

It was commonly said of the blockade runners that they could "smell their way from Hell Gate to Providence with their eyes shut." The war dragged on for four long years; but at its end, Nat Palmer and his friends had joined the company of true sailors.

With peace established once more, the three boys went their separate ways. Phineas shipped in a whaler bound for the South Pacific. Dick Loper signed for a voyage to China. Nat Palmer went into the coastal trade, where his quick rise from second mate to first mate was phenomenal.

Before he was nineteen years of age, Nat had become master of the schooner *Galena*. A stalwart, wide-shouldered fellow, he was now nearly six feet tall and still growing. His eyes, as his father had said when Nat was born, had the blue sea in them—level eyes of exceptionally far vision. His color was high and of the out-of-doors. His infrequent smile lighted what might otherwise have seemed an austere countenance in so young a man. Perhaps his sisters summed up the im-

pression he made on strangers when they said, "Nat is not good-looking, but he is good to look at." In any case, his good looks owed much to that sense of inner certitude which he conveyed. It entered a room with him, an almost tangible presence. Ever slow to anger, Nat was always exacting of the men who served under him. Sloppy seamanship he would not tolerate, and he owned that rare gift of inspiring confidence and loyalty in others.

Events were shaping up on the New England seaboard which would have a profound effect upon this young seaman's future. Some years before the war, Americans had established a lucrative trade in Antarctic sealskins, as well as in oil from the blubber of those animals known as elephant seals. Among the most ambitious merchants of New York at that time was one Elias Nexon, who had outfitted the brig *Betsy* for a sealing expedition to the Great Southern Ocean. On that remarkable voyage, a Stonington boy named Edmund Fanning had served as mate.

So successful was the *Betsy*'s first venture that the waters off Cape Horn—during the brief Antarctic summer—soon swarmed with the seal-hunting ships of many nations. The result was practical extermination, within a decade, of all the known herds. It was estimated that three million seals had been slaughtered on the island of Juan Fernández alone.

Edmund Fanning had grown wealthy during this short-lived trade. While still in his forties, he retired

from the sea, having won fame for an around-the-world voyage in the *Betsy* which, by that time, he himself commanded. Now, with the cessation of hostilities between England and America, Fanning was determined to outfit a vessel equipped to search for new sealing grounds. Like Old Zenas Coffin, the man was persuaded that the Lost Auroras might turn out to be something more than myth; and where there were lands untouched by man, there must be seals.

To this end, Edmund Fanning purchased the brig *Hersilia* and spared no expense in her outfitting. Captain James P. Sheffield was placed in command—a fine navigator of broad experience. The *Hersilia*, 88 tons burden, was 68 feet in length, with a 22-foot beam. She had been designed to carry a heavy cargo. Speed, in the sealing trade, was relatively unimportant; the brig would lie at anchor for weeks at a time while her sealskin cargo was gathered in smallboats, to be transferred from shore to ship.

For a number of years, with keen interest, Edmund Fanning had followed Nat Palmer's development. Here, the merchant decided, was the very fellow he needed: a young man grounded in the traditions of the sea, trained in the hard school of practical experience.

“You wanted to see me, sir?”

Nat Palmer was standing in the library of the Fanning mansion—a seagoing room filled with mementos of its owner's voyages to distant lands.

Edmund Fanning surveyed the young man who

stood so straight and foursquare before him. Fanning seldom mistook the tone of a man's voice or the look in his eye. He could recognize the noisy defiance of the braggart, or the obdurate silence of sullen men. But he knew real men when he saw them, and they had the same look in the eyes as this Nat Palmer.

"How old are you now, young man?" he asked.

"Nineteen, sir."

"H'mph! I've watched you ever since you were a wee squirt, sailing a boat in every mud puddle 'twixt here and Long Point. What's more, I've just been looking over the design for the sloop you hope to build in your father's yard."

"I hope you found merit in it, sir?"

The man nodded his approval. "You may be disappointed, m'lad, in the proposition I have to offer. But sit down, sit down! I understand you are master of the *Galena* these days. Isn't it time you slipped your hawser and got away from coastal waters? I offer you a demotion!"

"A *demotion*, sir? I'm afraid I don't understand—"

"Here's the lay of it," the other replied, settling his bulk in a chair and drumming his fingers on the teakwood table. "We all know, alas, that the sealing trade has reached an end. The greed of men—myself among them—has exterminated the herds that once summered at the Falklands and Juan Fernández. New rookeries must be found, or many a shipowner will be sailing both sheets aft for bankruptcy."

Nat glanced at the luxuriously appointed library,

gleaming with crystal and polished mahogany, lined with rows of fine books, and repressed a smile. "Not you, I trust, sir," he murmured. "Have you an idea where new grounds might be sought?"

For answer, Edmund Fanning spread out on the table the copy of a map which had been made in 1599 by the Dutch explorer, Dirck Gherritz. One squared-off forefinger pointed to a circle that had been drawn south by west of Cape Horn. There was a bright glint in the man's eyes as he glanced up.

"That hard-shelled Dutchman wasn't given to vapors," Fanning stated flatly. "To the day of his death, Gherritz believed that he had sighted land—possibly a group of islands—south by west of the Falklands. He called it the Lost Auroras. True, our Dutchman was sailing by dead reckoning and heavy weather was against him. But Kerguelen and Bouvet had a like experience. They reported in that region the presence of tremendous icebergs. To my belief, such bergs are fragments broken off from lands of great extent. I am convinced that land will be found between the latitudes of 60° and 65° S., and between 50° and 60° W. Now, here's my proposition: I'd like to sign you as second mate in the *Hersilia*. As I've said, it is a demotion from your rank as master of the *Galena*. But if the voyage proves successful, you'll come back with more gold jingling in your pockets than you will ever make in the coastal trade. What's more, you will have become a true deepwater sailor!"

For a second, Nat fell silent. His mind flashed back

to a day when he and Phineas Wilcox and Dick Loper had listened so eagerly to Old Zenas. Perhaps the old man hadn't been so far off soundings after all. Here was the great Capt. Edmund Fanning expressing almost the same beliefs: the Lost Auroras. . . .

"I myself know something of those waters, boy," Fanning was saying. "Summer or winter it's the most devilish region in the world! For days, for weeks on end, the blackest fogs, the heaviest gales never cease their fury. There's not an hour but icebergs are a constant peril. There's no protection, no escape from the cold. It strikes into the marrow of a man's bones. In the Antarctic, it is possible to freeze to death in your sleep and never know it till you wake up in paradise—if you're that lucky."

"Why are you telling me this?" the young man wanted to know.

"Because it's only fair to let the man who undertakes such a venture know what he has signed for."

Nat Palmer permitted himself his rare smile. The blue eyes danced. "A man can drown in a bucket of water as well as in a thousand fathoms, sir," he said. "I am honored by your offer. I'll sign, of course!"

Edmund Fanning came to his feet, right hand extended. Nat gripped it—with the hard, firm pressure of one who is setting forth on a long, uncertain journey.

"I knew you'd sign," the man said, smiling broadly. "May God prosper you, lad."



chapter 3

SOUTHWARD THE COURSE

FRIDAY, July 20, 1819.

Traditionally, Friday was an unlucky day for a ship to embark upon the waters. To this belief the old shell-backs still clung stubbornly, but wind and tide were no respecters of superstition. Neither was Capt. James P. Sheffield. Taking advantage of the ebb, and a most favorable slant of wind, Sheffield put the *Hersilia* out into the sound on the first leg of what was to become, in the annals of sealing, a memorable voyage.

A quartering breeze drove the brig eastward past the yellow headlands of Martha's Vineyard. By sundown, swimming in a haze of twilight, the three windmills of Nantucket were off the port bow.

Nat Palmer paused by the knightheads, for a moment oblivious of the activity about him. The *Hersilia* had taken her final leave of the land. While all of Nat's nineteen years had been spent upon the water, or within hand's reach of it, he was aware that the months to come would reveal the face of a sea world such as he had never known: blue-and-gold equatorial waters; the howling gales of the Roaring Forties. Then, south of Cape Horn, the ice-ridden latitudes within the Antarctic Circle—home of the albatross and of the killer whale.

Nat's pulse leaped in anticipation. For a second his thoughts flashed back to Old Zenas. Climbing the path to the old man's shed the day before, he had gone to say good-by.

"As sure as sharks eat little minnows, ye'll raise land sou'west o' the Falklands," Zenas had reiterated stubbornly. "And while ye're gone, I'll carve a figurehead fer the new sloop yer father's a-buildin'. What would ye prefer fer a figure, lad? A nice dolphin, now—?"

"Carve me a sea lion," Nat had laughed. "One to lead me straight to the seals."

The old man had sighed, like a bellows in a forge. "I won't breathe easy till I see ye all a-tanto again, with as many arms and legs as I carry myself." Here Zenas had caught himself up. "One *more* leg than I carry," he had amended, patting his peg leg. "This here tusk is all right fer a narwhal, but it's a pore substitute fer an old man's leg. Take keer o' yerself, sailor. Keep a weather eye liftin'."

Nat's father, in an unaccustomed show of affection, had flung one arm across his son's stalwart shoulders. "You'll have a command of your own to come home to, boy," he had promised. "You will have earned her."

Nat had taken leave of his sisters, of his mother. The woman had clung for a moment to whisper to this youngest son, who towered above her: "God watch over you, my boy, and speed the hours till you return."

All that had happened yesterday, but already it seemed a lifetime away.

Now the first mate, Mr. Hazard, was emerging from the companionway with a muster roll clutched in one fist. His sour, weatherworn face was contorted as he bawled: "Mr. Palmer! Call all hands to lay aft!"

The watches were about to be chosen. Nat wrenched open the foc'sle door and shouted into the depths of a smoky den: "All hands lay aft! Lively there, men! Tumble out!"

The foc'sle hands emerged, blinking in the waning sunlight; and for the first time the young second mate had an opportunity to take stock of these men among whom he was to live for the coming year. Lean, fat, short or tall, there was an indefinable air about them that set them apart from the landsman ashore. The weather-glancing eye and the hands half crooked as if to grip a rope were the hallmark of all men who go down to the sea in ships. Their rolling gait came from half a lifetime of climbing ratlines.

Nat's eye appraised each man in turn. He liked what

he saw: New Englanders, bone-lean and leathery—good men in a tight corner. There was a hulking Russian-Finn—fortunately not cross-eyed; for every superstitious sailor believed that a cross-eyed Finn brought bad luck to the foc'sle. There were two Scandinavians, limbed like Vikings, with broad impassive faces and eyes as clear as sea water. There was a "Bluenose" from Nova Scotia, where the world's finest sailors are born; and a pugnacious little Irishman from County Cork. A fine, seagoing crew.

But the ship's two apprentices, thirteen and fourteen years of age, were another story. Lured by the prospect of a life at sea, they had run away from farms in the back country. In nautical matters, they were as green as the hills that bred them. Luckily for them they fell into Nat's, the starboard watch; for the first mate was a bucko who would have chewed alive, bones and all, such miserable landlubbers as these. Though eager to please, both boys already were tinged with the greenish hue of first seasickness. Nat Palmer wondered if he himself had ever been so young and ignorant. Ah, well, the first good nor'easter would blow the hayseed out of their ears!

The fourteen-year-old, Stanton Bendick, though short of stature, looked wiry and strong. Perhaps he'd make a sailor. But the younger boy, Joey Budd, was frail of build, almost delicate. There was a scared, homesick look about him that boded ill for the future. At present, neither boy could have told the main-topmast stays'l sheet from the rudderpost. It was the

custom in those days to sign inexperienced boys as apprentices rather than men; for boys settled down quickly and learned fast, while a grown man with no prior experience in sail was apt to be a nuisance throughout the voyage.

On the brig's papers, the crew rated as follows:

1. Captain James P. Sheffield	9. Lars Gundersen, seaman
2. Ezra Hazard, mate	10. Nils Erikson, "
3. Nat Palmer, second mate	11. Soroff, "
4. Chips, the carpenter	12. Paddy Doyle, "
5. Saunders, sailmaker	13. Mott, "
6. Thompson, seaman	14. Cato Livingston, cook
7. Todd, "	15. Stanton Bendick, boy
8. Flint, "	16. Joey Budd, "

This was considered a good crew. With the exceptions of carpenter and sailmaker, all were reasonably young. Cato Livingston (known aboard ship as Cooky) was a Negro who bore the name of a respected family in which his forbears had been slaves. Mr. Hazard was a man soured by the fact that after twenty years at sea he had never won a command of his own. Soroff, the Russian-Finn, turned out to be a moody fellow who saw portents of bad luck in most of the natural phenomena of the sea. Already he'd been heard to mutter about the fate of a ship that set sail on a Friday. The two Scandinavians—Gundersen, a Norwegian, and Erikson, a Swede—sailed on even keel, splendid seamen both.

When the watches had been chosen, the captain

addressed his crew. "Men," said he, in his hoarse, commanding voice, "we are embarked on a long voyage via Cape Horn. Ours is a stout ship. Most of you, I am glad to see, have the look of real sail. You are expected to obey your officers instantly, to bear in mind at all times the welfare of the common interest. And remember, in a tight corner it's one hand for the ship and one for yourselves. You may go!"

The men received the captain's speech in silence. This was an old story to them. Those of the off watch filed forward, to take such rest as they were able. Four hours below passed quickly enough.

Owing to lack of space aft, Nat Palmer was berthed in the half deck with the two apprentices, with Chips, the carpenter, Erikson, the Swede, and the Russian-Finn, Soroff. The half deck was a cabin built under the break of the poop, on the brig's portside. Some twelve feet square, it was furnished with six bunks, end to end in three tiers; a folding table; a single whale-oil lamp. Sea chests provided the seating accommodation, serving also as the sailors' only wardrobe. Chips and the Swede, veteran shellbacks at sea, were making themselves comfortable. Nat was lashing down his sea chest. Soroff was staring moodily into space. Stan Bendick and Joey Budd, already queasy with seasickness, were stretched flat in their bunks.

Night closed down as the *Hersilia* clipped across the darkening swells under all plain sail.

When day dawned, the last vestige of land had disappeared. The final tie had been severed that bound

to home the ship and her complement of men. Hourly the breeze freshened, and the brig heeled smartly over under a pyramid of canvas. With the regularity of breathing, the cutwater sliced into masses of water that reached the level of the hawsepipes. Spray flew back over the bows, shot through by rainbows spun of sun and air. The taut rigging hummed like the plucked strings of a harp—music to Nat Palmer's ears. He could hardly believe that he was really embarked upon this voyage, to see for himself the fabulous wonders of Zenas Coffin's lost world.

Did they really exist? Or would they prove to be but the figments of an old man's imagination? Long months at sea, the solitude, the overpowering emptiness of space sometimes bred strange fancies in a man's mind, over which the mellowing years cast a wash of gold. But the Lost Auroras had become a part of Nat's childhood which he was singularly reluctant to lose.

On the quarter-deck, Captain Sheffield (or the "Old Man" as the commander, whatever his age might be, was always known on shipboard) was scanning the horizon with his glass. A full-rigged ship, a whaler homeward bound, was discovered off the *Hersilia*'s starboard bow. She was shouldering aside the tumbling seas.

"She's riding high, sir," Nat offered. "Not much oil coopered this voyage, I'd say."

The Old Man agreed, handing the glass to his junior officer. "Who do you make her out to be, mister?"

"Without a glass I'd recognize her at ten miles, sir,"

the other answered. "She'd be the *White Squall* out of Stonington, built in my father's yard when I was a kid. I know every bolt and gasket in her."

"Aye, she's riding high," the Old Man muttered. "The big fish are getting scerer and scerer. Pray God we have better luck on our venture."

Throughout the forenoon, the men of Nat's watch were occupied in catting and fishing the anchors. Since these weighed almost two tons apiece, it was an arduous task carrying an element of danger. Being Bower anchors, with a large stock, they could not be hove home through the hawsepope; they must be hoisted to the catheads—balks of timber projecting from the bows. Then by means of stout tackle rigged from the foremast head, they must be swung inboard and chained to iron ringbolts in the deck. Such a task could be trusted only to seasoned hands. Nat and Nils Erikson went over the side in bowlines and hooked on the catfalls—child's play for them both—and the plunging of the bows, the force of the wind, made of the job an exhilarating struggle. Someone had begun a chantey, in a strong clear voice, and the rest of the watch joined in with a rousing, "Heave away, my Johnny!"

Some say we're bound for Liverpool
Some say we're bound for France.
But now we're bound for Timbuktu
To give the girls a chance!
O heave away, my Johnny!

Throughout the day the wind had been making in sudden gusts and puffs. Light canvas had been clewed

up. At 4 bells in the first dogwatch, in a squall whipping up out of nowhere, the t'gallant sails were taken in. In spite of these steadyng measures, however, big green seas slipped over the weather rail, slewed across the decks to leeward, and the brig began to plunge and buck like a balky horse with the bit in its teeth.

Even in fair weather, the half deck was leaky; but now, with a storm making, water began to slosh across the floor. The whale-oil lamp, hanging from a deck-head misted with mold, swung in a wide arc with the brig's movement. Stan Bendick's sea chest had come loose and was charging from side to side, like a bull with lowered horns. Erikson, the patient Swede, was trying to show the distraught boy how to lash it properly.

Thirteen-year-old Joey, lost in the misery of seasickness, lay huddled in his bunk. At that moment the barnyard back home, the stove in the farmhouse kitchen, even the cows that had to be milked, would have been a welcome sight to his homesick gaze. The boy rolled over and hid his face in a sodden blanket.

Nat Palmer felt a surge of annoyance. Why had the Old Man signed such a boy, so patently unsuited to the rigors of the sea? Stan, now, was doing his best; but Joey had given up at the first roll and plunge of the ship's bows. How, Nat wondered, would he ever be able to make a sailor out of *this* one?

Chips, the carpenter, appeared in the doorway, took a quick glance around and found a place for himself

on top of a sea chest. Water dripped from his grizzled beard, steam rose from his wet clothing. A vigorous draw on his pipe added to the reek of the half deck.

He cast a glance at Joey's bunk. "Ye lads'll be glad ye left home, I'm thinkin'," he chuckled. "Let's see—yer Ma would be bastin' the turkey now, and settin' the mince pies to cool. But gammon! Shore food can't hold with ship fare. Ye can't beat a good hunk o' salt horse, now, with the brine still a-runnin' out of it."

A moan from Joey. Stan Bendick gulped.

"I tell ye wot to do," murmured Chips, eyes round with innocence. "Go to the galley and ask Cooky to give ye each a wedge o' salt pork. Tie a rope yarn to it and stand by fer a rush o' guts to the head. When ye feel it surge, swallow the pork, but hold onto the rope yarn. The pork will drive it back, and when everythin's quiet below, ye haul on the rope yarn and pull up the pork!"

Stan made precipitately for the door, falling over his feet in his necessity to reach fresh air. The unhappy Joey only burrowed deeper into his blankets.

Chips chuckled, recalling the days, so long ago, when he had gone to sea as a boy—the rough horse-play, the crude pranks played. "The sea," he sometimes philosophized, "knocks out all the bad in a boy and brings out all the good." He turned to the gray bundle in Joey's bunk, drove a playful fist into the boy's ribs. "Wot ye need, matey," said he, "is to drink a quart o' warm sea water and eat a hamper o' greens."

A moan from Joey. "Go away! Leave me alone—" A scornful snort was the answer. "And to think I went to sea forty years before yer mother ever had to wipe yer snivelin' nose!"

Soroff, the Russian-Finn, entered the cabin and slumped down on the edge of his bunk. For a moment he stared moodily into space, addressing himself to no one. There was something Mongoloid in his slightly slanting black eyes and high cheekbones. No one had ever seen him smile. In a low, sepulchral tone he muttered: "Friday—she is one bad day for sail. Bad luck to us all."

"Gammon!" Nat scoffed, impatiently. "An old wives' tale, that one. Friday's no different from any other day of the week."

"You will see," the other answered, wagging his head gloomily. "This ship, she is hard ship to work. All hands on deck all time. No rest at night. No rest at day. I tell you, you will see . . ."

But Nat was bending a sailor's ear to the sounds from aloft. The wind was shrilling a harsher note; the lurching of the ship's bows had become more violent. The outer sound of rushing water competed with the labored creak of timber as the *Hersilia* rolled about heavily.

"The Old Man will be taking the mains'l off her, like as not," Nat stated. "In a blow like this, that'll be work for all hands."

At that instant a sea smashed against the side of the house, causing it to tremble. The brig heeled over; the

lamp chimney fell with a clatter, leaving the foc'sle in darkness.

“Vatch out!” yelled Erikson.

Someone had opened the door, and an incoming sea swept into the half deck. A dark figure in the doorway was shouting: “Tumble out, you swabs! Muster aft!” At the same moment, the first mate’s voice could be heard in the outer darkness: “All hands on deck! Weather main clew garnets—”

Chips lumbered to his feet. On shipboard, carpenter and sailmaker stood no regular watches; but the call “all hands” was no respecter of persons. “That’ll be me, too,” muttered the old carpenter. “Wot a life! Wot a life!”

Nat laid a hand on Joey Budd’s cringing shoulder. “It means you as well,” he said brusquely. “There’s the devil to pay aloft, lad. Up on your pins and pull your share.”

Joey raised a white, scared face from the blanket. “I—I couldn’t, sir,” he stammered. “Please—”

Nat’s strong hand pulled the boy, not unkindly, to his feet. “There’s work aloft,” he said quietly. “Follow me!”

The words, the tone, brooked no disobedience; but in some way they inspired confidence. As the second mate swung his big frame through the door and out into the darkness of the storm, he was aware that the unhappy Joey was obeying orders. Perhaps there was some hope for the kid, after all.

A wild-looking sight met their eyes. The main deck

was flooded and seas were piling aboard. Stan and Joey, keeping Nat Palmer well in sight, crouched against the side of the house, watching for a chance to get aft without a ducking. A second later, the boys followed Nat as he made a break for it, taking the windward rail. They reached the quarter-deck without meeting an incoming sea and climbed the ladder. There the Old Man was standing, conning his ship by the feel of the wind. To windward, the boys could see black walls of water, livid with foam, loom for an instant above the bulwarks before dashing away into darkness.

The brig was straining badly. When she rolled down to leeward, she seemed to lie there for an instant, deep in the sea, as if beaten.

"Let go your t'gallant halyards," the Old Man bellowed.

Manning the clew lines, all hands hauled the yards down by main force. Stays'l halyards were let fly and hauled down, and the brig righted to a more normal angle. The men of both watches were working blindly but efficiently in their efforts to snug the brig down quickly.

"Let go your mains'l halyards—"

The men of Nat's watch were clearing the ropes in preparation for starting the tack. The mains'l was fighting like a thing alive. While all hands manned the clew garnets and buntlines in an effort to snug the mighty sail up to the yard, Nat slacked away a rope in the darkness to windward. The sodden canvas billowed weightily as the men hauled at the lines. This was rou-

tine labor for a seasoned crew. But for two country boys who wished fervently that they had never, never gone to sea, taking in the mains'l seemed an utterly impossible task. Ugh, how raw and cold the wind was!

To Joey Budd, the wildness of the storm, the first mate's sulphuric language, as he bullied his men, struck terror into the boy's soul. How could any man be so callous, so indifferent in the face of destruction, as to blaspheme in such manner? So utterly terrified was Joey that, for the moment, he forgot to be seasick. He was convinced that God in His wrath would strike the mate with a lightning bolt, and so destroy them all.

Slowly, painfully, inch by inch the fighting sail was being mastered. When finally the canvas had been hauled up close to the yard, the mate roared out: "Aloft and furl, ye burnt scorpions! Tail onto it or take the rope's end!"

With sure instinct the men sprang into the ratlines. They swarmed aloft like monkeys scurrying up a coconut tree. For a second Stan Bendick hung back, then reached halfheartedly for the ratlines. Nat Palmer yanked him rudely aside. This was no night for the cry "man overboard."

"Not you, lubber!" he barked. "Get into the break of the poop and watch how things are done. You, too, Joey. Tail onto it! See that you don't wash overboard—"

Nat swung himself up into the ratlines, his voice soaring above the wind as he urged his men to utmost effort. Aloft, in blackness relieved only by occasional

flares of lightning, the men fisted the sail and rolled it up to the yard.

Then, their task accomplished, they slid wearily down to the deck. All was snug aloft for the night. Helmsmen and lookout were relieved. The men of the starboard watch stomped below to snatch such rest as they could. Like scared rabbits, the two boys already had bolted for the security of the half deck. In no time Joey was wrapped again in his blankets, shaking like a mummy with the ague. Stan heaved a heavy sigh as he emptied the water out of his sea boots.

Nat struggled to repress a grin as he entered the half deck. "What do you think of life on the ocean wave now, m'lads?" he demanded.

Stan hesitated. "I hope it won't all be like this, sir. Don't this ocean ever calm itself down? It can't go on forever blowin' a tempest! Or can it?"

"Tempest?" Nat laughed. "This is just a bit of a blow. In a week's time you'll have your sea legs, boy, and be ready to swarm aloft with the best of us."

"*Aloft?*" The boy's voice hit a hollow note. "At home I could shin up the tallest elm—better 'n any kid I knew. But not with a wind howlin' like this one, or the earth goin' like a rockin' horse. And not at night in pitch-dark."

"You'll get used to it. Every lubber feels that way at first."

"Did *you*?" the boy demanded.

"That was different," Nat answered. "I was all but born in a shipyard. There were two kids my own age

I used to play Barbary pirates with. I can't remember when we weren't climbing over a ship from main-truck to keel. The first time you go aloft, sure, you're bound to be scared. After that it's child's play."

Stan listened dutifully, albeit with a sickly grin. The mute bundle that was Joey Budd suggested that, as far as he was concerned, an order to go aloft would be equivalent to a death sentence.

Nils Erikson came stomping into the half deck, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog. "You don' like dis?" he chaffed, grinning at Stan. "How you like to do it every day for ten years yet? Ven I go home to Stockholm I say: Erikson, you are vun blasted fool! Dis is last time you go to sea. But *ach!* here I am again. *Ja*, every year it is the same. The sea—she von't let me go."

There was no heat in the half deck and no means of drying clothes. Chips and the Swede lay down in their bunks without undressing. Nat stripped off wet jacket and pants, wrung them out and hung them up before turning in. The Russian-Finn had picked up a deep cut along the edge of one hand. He sat on his sea chest—burly as a bear—and cursed in some outlandish language as he packed the ugly wound with a scrap of tarred yarn.

"Douse that lamp, Erikson," called Nat.

The big Swede leaned from his bunk and blew down the lamp chimney. Swift darkness lent a new dimension to the noises of the outer storm. The half deck trembled as heavy seas smashed over the weather rail.

The brig creaked and groaned, like some living thing muttering in uneasy sleep.

Only little Joey remained awake. The sound of water, somehow reminding the boy of rain drumming on the attic roof at home, gave him no peace. Joey had run away to sea the day after his mother died, leaving him to the mercy of a stepfather whose inflexible maxim was: "Spare the rod and spoil the child." How often Joey's mother, from whom he drew his frailness, had stood between him and the sickening humiliation of a beating! And so in the dark hours of the night at sea, the boy listened to the rain drumming on the roof. Two scalding tears rolled down his thin cheeks as he turned his face to the wall.



chapter 4

ORDEAL BY HEIGHT

FOR THREE DAYS the "bit of a blow" held. The *Hersilia* ran with only fore'sls set, slicing through big green seas out of the southwest. As the hours passed, some semblance of order was established in the half deck. Already, as Nat Palmer had predicted, Stan was achieving something of an even keel. But although the pangs of seasickness had begun to subside, Joey was still miserably unhappy. Guessing at something of the struggle the boy was making, Nat remained hopeful but vaguely uneasy. Just as surely as there are men born to live out their lives in countinghouses, bent over the

dusty pages of ledgers, so there were men born to follow the sea. Joey would never be among them.

The food grew more inviting as appetites waxed. Not that it had actually changed for the better: it was simply that healthy outdoor activity and the bracing tonic of sea air honed appetites to razoredge. One real meal a day was shipboard custom. For men engaged in the hardest kind of physical labor, this seemed little enough. Most shipmasters believed that men worked harder on an empty stomach. "Feed 'em too much," Captain Sheffield often said, "and you'll see 'em grow fat and lazy."

The one real meal was dinner. This consisted of a mug of soup, either bean or pea, and a pound of beef or pork per man. For breakfast there was a pannikin of liquid hopefully known as coffee, and for supper a similar pannikin of tea sweetened with molasses. Plenty ofhardtack eked out these two meals, if such they could be called.

There was an old foc'sle saying to the effect that the Lord supplies the food but the Devil himself cooks it. It was Cooky's job to weigh all meat before cooking, and in the weighing there was sure to be a generous makeweight of bone and gristle. Uncooked, the meat itself was as hard as granite. For twenty-four hours it was first soaked in brine well saturated with saltpeter. When the meat was removed from the 40-gallon cask (which was larger at the bottom than at the top, to prevent capsizing), the brine invariably had turned a dark, malodorous brown. This, doubtless, was the rea-

son why the casks were known as "harness casks," and the meat itself as "salt horse." One of the favorite ditties of the foc'sle went like this:

"Old horse, old horse, what brought you here?

From Sacarap to Portland Pier

I carted stone for many a year.

I labored long and well, alack!

Till I fell down and broke me back.

They picked me up with sore abuse

And salted me down for sailor's use.

Old horse, old horse, what brought you here?"

Whenever a fresh cask of beef was broken open, it was customary for Cooky to pick out choice cuts for the after cabin, reserving the stringier portions for the crew. Twice a week, duff was served as a special delicacy. The officers' duff was seasoned with spices and plums or raisins and served up with lemon sauce. But the crew's duff was made of sterner material—steamed in a cloth sack, seasoned with salt and sour apples, served with a sauce (if any) of molasses.

It took a landlubber some time to become accustomed to a diet of salt horse, which had a way of taking the skin off the roof of a man's mouth. But, just as the palms of the hands grew calloused by hauling ropes, the mouth toughened up also; and before long a real sailor could digest practically anything he could swallow.

The little Irishman, Paddy Doyle, laughed as he

watched the boys pick weevils out of their hardtack. "Sure and ye ought to sail once in a lime-juicer," he told them. "Two years of it I had, and, by St. Patrick, it was enough even for the loikes of me! What d'ye think was standard fare? I'll tell ye what it were: two draws at yer pipe and another reef hole in yer belt!"

Well at sea by now, in fine weather, the brig's appearance had undergone a change. Scrubbed, holy-stoned, all brightwork polished, all was shipshape a low and aloft. Gone was the grimy, unkempt look which comes from long idleness in port. From the beginning of the voyage it had been the Old Man's boast: "There is a place for everything and I'll have everything in its place." It was the unrelenting job of first and second mates to see that this passion for order was carried out. The rows of polished buckets, racks of capstan bars, pinrails with long lines of neatly coiled ropes, bright-work gleaming—all was as orderly as the most exacting shipmaster could demand.

Up for'ard, atop the foc'slehead, a pen had been built for the four pigs which ultimately would fall to the officers' mess. There was a second pen for a dozen chickens. To Joey and Stan fell the unrewarding labor of keeping these pens clean. One of the pigs, particularly ungrateful for personal service, had to be held at bay by one boy with a broom while his companion took care of the barnyard chores.

"Why in tarnation does the Old Man think I shipped to sea, anyway?" Stan demanded. "It was to get away

from livestock, that's why! I could be doin' this back home."

But Joey was glad enough of this familiar task. He felt more at home among chickens and pigs than he did in the harsh man's world of the foc'sle. The boy was trying gamely to do his best—to anticipate an order if possible, to cover the fear that leaped into his eyes whenever he forced himself to glance aloft. But in his heart he knew that what made Nat Palmer and all the others true sailors, what was already beginning to show up in Stan, was not in him, Joey Budd. No matter how hard he tried, he would never wholly succeed.

To Stan's delight, the barnyard chores were somewhat eased when a wave, crashing over the bows, whipped across the foredeck and smashed the chicken run to splinters. Amid a confusion of shouting men, cackling poultry and flying feathers, the Old Man's chickens spread their wings and took to sea, never to be seen again. With them went the last fresh egg that would be eaten for many a long month.

The captain received news of this incident with better grace than Nat Palmer had anticipated. It gave him a chance to speak of a matter that still concerned him.

"About the boys, sir," he began. "Stan Bendick may turn into a sailor if he stays with the sea long enough. But that other one—it's not in him. Joey's willing enough, but—" Nat shook his head.

"You may be right," the Old Man agreed. "The boys of Stonington, as you know, are no longer boys at

twelve or thirteen: they're seasoned seamen. You yourself were a blockade runner at that age. I had to sign what I could get—these two miserable farm hands! But I'm confident, mister, if anyone can whip them into shape, it's you. And don't be too easy on 'em!"

With the advent of good weather and the establishment of order, Nat began to initiate his young charges into the rigors of a sailor's calling. To his surprise, within a short time, they were familiar with the names of all ropes necessary for handling the brig; but knowing the name of a rope is a different matter from being able to lay your hand on it in a hurry on a dark night. Theory could go so far. Then only practice made for perfection. The time had come, Nat decided, for the boys to learn their way around aloft.

"Up you go, lads," he said brusquely one fine morning. "You, Joey—you've got the most to learn. You're first, lubber."

Joey turned a despairing eye on the second mate, whose bronzed face showed a rigid unconcern for fear.

"Please, sir," the boy stammered, "I don't think I—"

"Hold onto the shrouds," Nat interrupted. "Not the ratlines. And mind you, don't look down."

Involuntarily Joey shrank back, again glancing beseechingly at the mate.

"Tail onto it!" came the heartless command. "You won't be the first apprentice to fall from a r'yal yard, nor the last!"

While Stan Bendick looked on, swallowing nervously, Joey climbed to the bulwarks, stepped upon the sheer pole, then onto the first ratline. Reluctantly he pulled himself up into the foreshrouds. The boy's throat felt dry, his feet weighted. There was a jellylike weakness in his legs.

"Don't grab the ratlines, I told you," Nat barked. "It's the shrouds you want. And forget your feet. No looking down! You're going to polish the main-truck, m'lad, and it's no hayride getting up there. Lively, now!"

Fearfully, an inch at a time, the trembling boy made his way upward. His cold hands clutched convulsively at the shrouds with the grip used instinctively by every beginner. Joey didn't know then that sailors who fell from the rigging invariably were old hands grown careless; he knew only that this was the most terrifying experience of his young life.

From the deck below, Nat Palmer followed the boy's progress, hiding from Stan the concern he felt for this frail boy who must somehow be shaped into a sailor. There was always the chance that a landlubber, made dizzy by height, might panic, lose his grip and plunge into the sea; or, worse still, strike the deck 150 feet below.

Looking neither to right nor left, staring rigidly ahead, Joey was climbing doggedly. Up and up he went, until the futtock shrouds at the head of the lower rigging stopped him. The futtocks stretched outward to support the platform above. To negotiate them

successfully, a man must turn first upon his back, as if climbing the inside of a steeply inclined ladder; then with feet toward the mast and head extended into space, he must haul himself upward by sheer muscle. Joey's arms ached, his breath came panting. His hands were slippery with sweat. How much longer could he hold on?

"Let him come down, sir," Stan begged, nervously. "Joey's awful little! And he ain't very strong—"

"If he gives up now," came the stern answer, "he'll never have the spirit to try again." Raising his voice, Nat shouted: "Aloft there! Get on up with you. Lively about it!"

There was one moment when it seemed to those on deck, watching, that the boy quailed. "He'll never make it," Stan was muttering. "Never—"

But Nat, remembering the Old Man's injunction, called out: "Aloft there—keep going!"

Pluckily Joey pulled himself out over the futtock shrouds, up onto the comparative safety of the platform. There he sank down thankfully with a gasp of relief.

Nat smiled with satisfaction. Say what you might, the kid had spirit! It was taking far more courage for Joey to climb to the maintop than it would have taken for Nils Erikson to plunge a harpoon into the gaping jaws of a whale.

"Aloft there—what are you waiting for?"

The boy rose up on the platform, fumbled for a hold in the topmast rigging. Step by step he climbed,

up an ever-narrowing web of ropes that seemed to have no beginning and no end. They were like the web of some monstrous spider and he, Joey Budd, was a human fly caught forever in that snare. The boy's head was spinning, his mouth dry. Sick and giddy, he paused at the topmast head.

"Keep going, lubber!" That inexorable voice reached him from below.

Joey glanced upward at the maze of ropes leading to the haven of the crosstrees. The crosstrees, Chips had told him, were more difficult to surmount than the futtocks. Glancing uncertainly at the lubber's hole, the boy longed for the courage to sneak through it; but Chips had cautioned him that any landlubber who tried that trick would catch fire and brimstone from the mate.

With sinking heart Joey laid hold of the crosstrees ropes and pulled himself up—up to the wooden platform. Nat and Stan could guess, rather than hear, the cry of relief that burst from him as he sank to his knees. Two hurdles had been cleared, but the race was still far from won!

Feeling like a slave driver, Nat bellowed once again: "Aloft there—"

The pitch of his voice carried clearly against the widening distance. Stan stood with head thrown back, mouth agape. His own turn would come only too soon, and he quaked inwardly.

Joey had never heard the nautical maxim, "Growl you may but go you must," but the pitch of the mate's

voice bore a message that brooked no denial. By this time the boy's hands were burned where blisters had risen and burst. His thin back and shoulders were one intolerable ache. Clinging now with the grip of desperation, Joey picked his way up the t'gallant rigging which came to an end at the t'gallant masthead: not so long a climb as the topmast, but long enough. He laid hold of the t'gallant yard and planted both feet in the foot-rope swinging from its stirrups beneath, and there he clung for very life, unable to move.

The skys'l yard had been struck. Nothing remained above Joey's head but the bare pole of the royal mast crossed by the royal yard. Then, and only then, for the first time the boy ventured a downward glance. Instantly he shut his eyes. The blood froze in his veins. Oh, how had he ever managed to reach such a height! And *how* would he ever get down? Why didn't he just jump off and be done with it?

"Up with you, you farmer!"

That voice came to the boy as the flick end of a horsewhip from which escape was impossible. Joey's stepfather had used a horsewhip. . . . The boy stared up at the stark royal mast. Could he manage it? If he failed, he would never have to face the wrath of the Old Man, for he would be dead. And at that moment, death seemed a welcome release from this torture of body and spirit. Slowly, as one acting under hypnosis, Joey reached out to catch the royal backstay. His feet swung clear of the ratlines. There came a split second when he hung by a single hand, before his trembling

legs could twist themselves around the stay—a sheer drop of 150 feet.

Suddenly, almost before Joey knew what had happened, he was astride the royal yard. He glanced up at the remaining feet of bare pole surmounted by the shining gold ball of the main-truck. That ball was the last thing between him and the sky. And suddenly the boy was filled with a wild elation. For the space of a second, fear exploded into nothingness. He shouted to the wind, to the sky, to the wheeling gulls: "I did it, I did it, I *did* it!"

Now Joey dared to look around him. Forgetting the pull of gravity, some measure of his dizziness vanished. Close overhead, white clouds raced on the wind, like galleons tacking home to port. Below, the sharp-cut rim of the horizon swept to form a perfect circle. Under the boy's feet, an acre of canvas swelled drum-taut in the breeze. The ocean seemed transparent, and in its depths could be seen the shadows of fish moving.

"Ahoy up there!" Nat Palmer's voice brought Joey back to his present predicament. "Hang on! Stan's coming aloft—"

It seemed an interminable time until Stan joined him on the royal yard. "I made it, Stan, I made it!"

"Sure, I knew you could all the time."

"How'll we ever get down?"

"Same way we came up: by guess and by Jupiter."

The second mate's voice came soaring up to them. "Lay out and furl that r'yal, lubbers. Brisk about it up there!"

Cautiously the boys laid out on the yard, feet fumbling for the footrope. Innumerable times, from the safety of the deck, the boys had watched men aloft take in and furl sail. They knew what ought to be done but—could they do it? Awkwardly, with clumsy fingers, they cast adrift the gaskets. The sail whipped away from their clutch, thrashing like a banner. One blow from that heavy canvas and they would be flung like crumbs from a carpet into the seething sea below. The motion of the ship, slight enough on deck, at that great height was intensified, and the royal yard was swaying ponderously across the sky.

“Lay into it up there! What’s got into you?”

The boys picked up the bunt and lay to it. Clutching the canvas as best they could, they slowly dragged it in, inch by stubborn inch. Time and again it whipped from their grasp just as they were beginning to make it fast to the yard. Their muscles ached with the strain. Blood covered their hands where fingernails had torn away. Each time the sail broke free from their clutch, the whole heart-rending business had to be gone through again. At last, almost at the end of their endurance, they succeeded in getting the gaskets passed and the sail snugged down. It had taken the best part of one hour.

They started to slide into the shrouds, when that inexorable voice reached them from below. “Aloft—you call that a shipshape job?”

Somehow Stan managed to grind out: “Yes—sir—”

"Then lay out there again and make a proper job of it, or you'll both be put on half rations!"

There was nothing for it but to cast loose once more those hard-fought gaskets.

Through clenched teeth Stan grated: "The mate's a monster. I hope a shark gets him—"

"Or a cannibal," Joey muttered, weakly.

The boys let go the gaskets as reluctantly as if they had been their hold on life. Doggedly they tackled the heartbreaking job once more. This time, perhaps because their fingers already were more skilful, they clipped a good ten minutes off the first attempt.

But still Nat Palmer was unsatisfied. If these boys didn't learn to furl sail properly in the beginning, they would be slipshod sailors all their lives, the sort known contemptuously to old hands as "sojers."

"Ahoy, aloft!" he shouted. "Hold on! I'm coming up—"

Nat went swarming up the shrouds with the agility of a monkey. In no time he was out on the royal yard, lending his skill to instruct these boys who were his charges.

"Here's the proper way," he cried. "Watch smart now and learn something!"

His fingers dug savagely into the canvas. Bracing his knees under the yard, Nat pulled the sail to windward, holding firmly under his stomach that canvas already gathered in. When he had reached the foot (lower edge of the sail), he put a temporary turn around the yard

with the end of the gasket, until he had rolled up the sail. Then he moved rapidly over to leeward, pulling the sail toward the bunt until everything was rolled up handsomely. Passing the gasket and going back to windward, he finished with a regular harbor furl.

"There it is, m'lads—snug as a bug and easy as you please."

The boys, meanwhile, had been hanging on for very life. Their focus of the world had narrowed to that wind-swept circle in which they swung between sea and sky.

Nat's grin flashed white. "Understand it now?" he asked. "All you need's the practice. I'll see that you get plenty of it! Down from aloft, now—Easy, mates."

He remained on the yard until he saw that both boys were safely on deck, where he soon joined them. Some of the older hands had been standing by, gazing aloft, nodding their approval, remembering the days of their own apprenticeship and their first ordeal by height.

Fetching each boy a good-natured clap on the back, Nat told them: "You'll do, lads. Next time it'll be easier. And the third time it'll be like sitting in a rocker. Into your bunks now—lively!"

The praise fell on ears that were deaf. Both boys, Joey in particular, were weaving with fatigue. Stan bolted for the half deck; but the decks were awash, and the luckless Joey, watching his chance to run for it, paused for a second. That second proved his undoing. Before he could reach the corner of the cabin, the ship gave a lurch to leeward. Wildly Joey's hands

clutched at a corner of the cabin which, being rounded, offered no fingerhold. His feet shot out from under him. Flat on his back he landed, spinning round and round across the slippery planking. Vainly he grabbed for a cleat on the water butt, missed it. His head struck the place where his hands should have been.

Half dazed, Joey pulled himself to his feet. From head to foot, his body was one trembling ache. He saw Nat Palmer's look of concern and somehow managed a sickly smile. "I'm all right, sir—"

The words had scarcely left the boy's lips when he toppled over in a dead faint. This day at sea had been too much for Joey Budd.



chapter 5

IN THE SECOND DOGWATCH

THE ORDEAL of height was only the beginning of Joey's initiation. The following day, he stood his first trick at the wheel. All the crew were supposed to get their turn—two hours in each watch. Steering a brig under full sail, the boy quickly discovered, was considerably more difficult than it appeared to be when you were watching someone else doing it. The helmsman stood on a raised platform at the windward side of the big teakwood wheel. In front of him was the compass, which he must watch carefully. Somehow, at the same time, he must also keep one eye lifting to the

draw of the sails, lest they be taken aback; and still another eye for the ship's head. A lot for any landsman to remember!

"Keep your eye on that needle," Nat warned, "and hold her to the course. Forget whatever is happening around you. Concentrate on the compass and steer by the wind. And don't lean against the wheel—unless you've got an iron jaw!"

"Yes, sir," Joey quavered, determined this time to make a good showing of it. He felt humiliatingly small in comparison to the great circle of the wheel, the upper spokes of which stood a foot above his head.

The *Hersilia* had the old-fashioned tackles—that is, the wheel wound the control ropes around a wooden drum, thus pulling the tiller from side to side to move the rudder. This type of tackle, if damaged in storm, lent itself to easy repair; but it had the disadvantage of being hard to control. In moderate weather the wheel moved easily enough; but in heavy winds when the brig began to swing on a sea, it called for the strength of two or even three men to control the helm against water pressure. When the brig was headreaching, and an unexpected wave smacked the rudder, the wheel could spin quickly out of control. Caught unaware, the helmsman who tried to catch it on the spin was apt to be flung overboard.

Fortunately for Joey, the weather that day was moderate. But it was his bad luck to hear a cry come ringing from the masthead: "Sail ho! Sail ho-o-o!"

"Where away?" echoed Nat Palmer.

“Two points off starboard bow—”

The foc'sle hands sprang into the rigging, scampered aloft, straining their eyes to see the stranger. In shrill voices they speculated on her name, her cargo, her destination. This proved to be too distracting for Joey Budd. Stealing a surreptitious glance to starboard, he beheld a pyramid of snowy canvas—a full-rigged ship homeward bound. Oh, what wouldn't he have given to be aboard her!

Then everything seemed to go wrong at once. The wheel gave a sudden kick, wrenched itself out of the boy's hands. The sails, which should have been taut and drawing, began to flap aimlessly. Instantly the compass needle slipped a point, two points off course. It all happened in a flash. Fortunately Joey managed to catch the wheel without accident, but found himself wrestling with a stubborn obstacle that refused to yield. The wheel might have been made of iron.

“You at the helm—hard over, *hard over!*” shouted Nat Palmer.

At the same moment the Old Man came bounding on deck. “What's going on here?” he bellowed.

Quickly Nat thrust a spyglass into the captain's hand. “A ship to starboard, sir,” he said. “Might be the *Mandarin* out of Salem—”

With the Old Man's attention momentarily diverted, Nat skilfully brought the brig back to her true course. “Take your eye off that needle again,” he muttered, in stern tone, to Joey, “and I'll have Cooky boil you up with the salt horse!”

"I—I'm sorry," quavered the boy. "And—thank you, sir."

"Stow your thanks," was Nat's gruff reply. "A ship could be dismasted that way, and a runaway wheel can cripple a man. Now, then, take hold of the lee wheel and learn something."

Day by day the air grew milder. Each morning's sun struck spearheads of light from the ever-deepening blue of the sea. The tropics at last! This change in weather reflected itself in shipboard routine. Almost overnight, it seemed, the men forgot the rigors of their Atlantic baptism. No longer were they routed from their bunks to fist sail on wildly swaying yards; they turned in on their off watch to sleep a full four hours; they turned out refreshed and ready to go.

Storm-weather clothing dried out at last and was laid away for future use. Boots and shoes found their way into sea chests. The crew went about their labors barefooted. Trousers of duck were all the clothing anyone bothered to wear, and beards grew like untrimmed hedges.

In the off watches of foc'sle and half deck, keepsakes and mementos were passed from hand to hand. Every true sailor carried with him a bit of home, a remembrance of the fireside he had forsaken, of the loved ones he might never see again.

"Sure, matey, she's my sweetheart. Ain't much to look at mebbe, but she give me this scarf. Said I'd need it off Cape Horn."

"My old lady didn't give me nothin' but a headache. Made me promise to write, but ye know how it is. There ain't a splice I can't turn, neat as ye please; but put a quill in me hand and I'm all thumbs."

"That's me, too. Besides, I can't never think of nothin' to say. Nothin' ever happens at sea."

There was a reverse side to this bright coin of the tropics, for the ever-intensifying heat brought from hiding unimaginable hordes of cockroaches. These pests were as inseparable from the old ships as were the rats in the bilge. Hundreds, thousands, finally millions of roaches emerged from every crack and crevice in the brig's timbers. Though the men killed them by legions, fresh platoons marched across the bodies of the slain. Every crumb of food in the lockers was devoured. Like animated raisins they studded thehardtack. They rode like gulls on the surface of every mug of soup or pannikin of coffee from the galley. The crew, acknowledging defeat at last, turned into their bunks at night, wearing their shoes to keep the soles of their feet from being gnawed.

As the region of the trade winds grew closer, it was the custom to shift all sail. A ship wore her stoutest canvas in the gales of the North Atlantic or in the great westerlies of the Southern Ocean; but when skies were soft and breezes gentle, she shifted into her lightest and most worn attire. Replacing Number 1 canvas with Number 2 meant heavy work for both watches—an unbroken performance of running up and down the rigging, laying out on the yards, heaving, hauling,

sweating under a blistering tropical sun. No one looked forward to the ordeal.

As 4 bells struck, all hands including Chips and the sailmaker were tumbled out to make the necessary shift. The suit of summer canvas was hauled on deck, while gantlines were rove in readiness at the mastheads. From the quarter-deck the Old Man shouted: "Mr. Hazard, take the port watch for'ard. Mr. Palmer, starboard watch to the main."

In this fashion the backbreaking job began. First, the two heavy courses were unbent, lowered, rolled up on deck and stowed away for future use off Cape Horn. The new sails which would replace them were stretched flat, bent onto the buntlines and hoisted aloft, where they were secured to the jackstays.

After the courses there came a short and welcome breather for breakfast. Then it was the tops'l—those aloft unbent, the new ones bent and sheeted home. Next came the t'gallant sails, and finally the royals. As this prodigious labor progressed, a keen rivalry developed between the two watches to see which would finish its mast first—those on the foremost or those on the main. Nat Palmer and Mr. Hazard, entering into the game, urged their men on, while from the quarter-deck the Old Man watched with keenest interest. This was an old story to the captain, but one ever fresh with the remembered excitement of his own early days at sea. By the time the t'gallants had been swayed aloft and set, all hands were plunging into it with blood up. The royals rose to the rousing hand-over-hand chantey:

A-way hey! O haul him high-O!
Way hey!
O haul him high-O!
Raise him high and haul him high-O!
A-way hey! A-way hey!

Scarcely had "high-O!" left the lips of the chantey-men before the canvas was being snatched out along the yard, the sheets whipped on with a triumphant shout: "Ready below! Hoist awa-a-ay!"

By the time the last of the Number 1 canvas had been bundled into the locker, all hands were ready for the special treat of plum duff which Cooky had been instructed to prepare. That night no singsong enlivened half deck or foc'sle. All hands were too weary to do more than puff at a pipe or talk over the touch-and-go race which had taken place between the two watches.

Nat Palmer, however, was never too tired to talk to his men about their function as sailors. The two boys listened willingly enough, eager to learn. But many of the older hands had been at sea before Nat Palmer was born, and to them the young second mate was still wet behind the ears. The old shellbacks refused to admit, even to themselves, that the longest number of years in service did not always mean the best sailor. Indeed, the Old Man himself sometimes used the term "old sailor" with a note of contempt; for to him it signified the type of seaman who would always be content to ship before the mast, without the initiative or ambition to rise to command. Privately he considered Mr. Hazard something of an "old sailor"; for the first mate

was Captain Sheffield's senior by three years and yet—due to some flaw in his nature—had never won a command. Frequently the captain admonished the boys: "Don't be an old sailor. Listen to what Mr. Palmer tells you and learn something."

Already Nat himself, in waters strange to his experience, had learned a great deal from the captain of the *Hersilia*. To James Sheffield the face of the sky or the sea were like the pages of a book written in a language that was his own. He stressed the importance of studying the ways of sea birds, of land birds, and of the creatures of the sea. Strengthened by years of practical experience, his instinctive knowledge of winds and weather, of the natural history of the sea, was truly impressive. To Nat it seemed sometimes as if the Old Man navigated the ship more by the movements of the upper and lower clouds, by the behavior of birds and fishes, than by the more orthodox methods of astronomy and mathematics. Frequently he peppered his comments with such pithy maxims as: "Any fool can make sail. It needs a good sailor to take it in." Or again: "A clear sky to south'ard is sure sign of a wet jacket." But his favorite was: "Obey orders if you break owners." Which, translated, meant: At sea you always did what you were told, even if you thought it was wrong.

By tradition the second dogwatch, between six and eight of an evening, belonged to the foc'sle hands. It was the one time when the men were free to gather

together for a chin-wag, for a singsong, for a tall story. It was a welcome respite from the rigors of rough weather, a breathing space in which to prepare themselves for the roaring gales of the great westerlies. The second dogwatch was a sanctuary not to be intruded upon by the officers.

During those two hours, no work was required of the crew except to keep the ship on her course. Some of the men passed the time patching their worn clothing; others speculated upon the weather, the ship's daily run. The younger hands sang and danced. The oldsters were content to draw on their pipes and spin tall yarns.

Stan and Joey never tired of prodding Chips into reminiscence. The old carpenter, like Zenas Coffin of Stonington, relished an audience and was always willing to oblige.

"Life aboard a sealer, lads," he would say, "can't hold a candle to life aboard a whaler. As fer the whales and seals themselves—there ain't no trick to takin' a seal. Any fool who can swing a club can kill one o' them critters. But wait till ye fasten to a reg'lar old bull whale, m'lads—specially one that has a dozen irons in him already!"

"How long you been to sea, Chips?" Stan wanted to know.

The old carpenter chuckled. "As the old sayin' goes, me mother was a mermaid and I was born on the crest of a wave. She rocked me in the cradle of the deep and I ain't never left the sea 'cept to git married once.

That was at Cape Town and I ain't never been back. Lizzie, her name was. And me and Lizzie and the land—we didn't agree. I've sailed in every ocean where whales are to be had. Ye can't imagine the sights I've seen! On the Banks of Newfoundland when the fog was so heavy ye could scarce stand up under it, and the dark was so thick ye could slice it like blubber, the blasted mate would order me aloft—and me only a kid, not knee-high to a sea gull! Up the shrouds I'd go—round over the maintop, with no lubber's hole to creep through. I larned to stick like a bloodsucker when the ship was rockin' like a cradle and dippin' her sails in the ocean. Tough? Aye, that it was!"

"Was it all as bad as that?" Joey prodded, hopefully. "Ain't there ever anything *good* about the sea?"

The old man wagged his head. "When I were yer age, matey, I got my share o' kicks and cuffs. In those days I was always the lightest hand on board, so it were always *my* job to shin up the masthead and fix the signals. Mebbe that didn't make my pins tremble! Why, my hands shook so I thought if I was only ashore I could make a fortune scatterin' clover seed on a farm. I was gone a year and a half on that fust voyage. When I came back, I was a jolly jack-tar, I can tell you. And I've followed the sea ever since. I expect to die in it. My old bones wouldn't never rest if they was to be buried ashore."

Now and again, when it seemed that Chips was laying the story on too thick, the sailmaker would send the boys a knowing wink. At sixty-odd, Sails was

ruddy-cheeked and clear of eye. The scrub of beard that circled his jaw might have been made of rope yarn, and his compact frame was as tough as the rock maple of the *Hersilia*'s keel. He was a staunch defender of the superstitions so close to the heart of all old shell-backs.

Hitching himself closer to the boys and lowering his voice, Sails whispered: "That man Soroff, keep a weather eye on him! A Roosian he calls himself. But I'm here to tell ye he's a Roosian-Finn and there's naught worse aboard a ship. Should he stick his knife in a mast, hurricanes will dog us, calms beset, and we'll be lucky not to be lost on a lee shore. They bring bad luck to others, them Roosian-Finns, and good luck to theirselves. Their grog bottle is never full nor empty, but always awash. And all they has to do is thrust a hand into a pocket to produce a gold doubloon."

These things the sailmaker told not as a man who relates a yarn, but as one who states a testament of faith.

"Have you ever seen St. Elmo's fire, Sails?" Joey asked. "Some of the men call it the corposant. What's the difference?"

The old man dropped his voice still lower, as one who fears to be overheard. "Corposant or St. Elmo's fire," he breathed, "there ain't no difference. But it's bad, all bad. The last time I saw it was in the brig *Evenin' Star*, on a lee shore off Tierra del Fuego, and Davy Jones was reachin' fer us all. Whiles the storm was at its worst, I saw it twice: a small, glitterin' ball o' fire at the masthead. Then two o' 'em on the ends

of the r'yal yard—bluish it were, like a star. And I tell ye, lads, it set me shakin' like a gaff-tops'l in a squall!"

"Why?" Joey wanted to know. "What's so terrible about St. Elmo's fire?"

Sails fixed the boy with piercing glance. "Why?" he echoed hollowly. "Because *death* follows in its wake—like a cart after a horse. That same night the captain was washed off the poop and the mate fell from the mainmast crosstrees. 'Twas only by the grace o' God we lived to make port. Don't even *whisper* o' the corposant, lad, if ye know what's healthy."

Joey trembled. He promised never again to mention St. Elmo's fire. Something in the sailmaker's tone had sent a shiver of apprehension down the boy's spine. Fear of the sea, and all connected with it, never left Joey Budd for long. Even in the blue-and-gold days of the tropics, behind the smiling, friendly face of sea and sky, lurked the hint of some terrible power which, unleashed, could destroy them all.



chapter 6

THE MAKING OF A SAILOR

THE *Hersilia* had picked up the northeast trades. With a spanking breeze on her starboard quarter, and every sail set from skys'ls to flying jib, she was reeling off the knots at a great clip, running beneath a summer sky. Here, for twenty degrees of ocean, the wind hauled out of the east-northeast, scarcely shifting a handbreadth the year around.

“Flying-fish weather,” the oldsters called it, and the reason wasn’t far to seek: flying fish fled in skimming shoals at the ship’s approach, the sun glinting on their gauzy wings. Dolphins were sporting about the bows,

arching their beautiful bodies and diving, their backs glistening with rainbows.

"A fish with wings," marveled Stan Bendick. "Whoever would ha' thought a fish could fly!"

Here were the halcyon latitudes of which sailors dreamed through blistering doldrum days, or more often when chilled to the marrow in the icy winds off Cape Horn. To Nat Palmer the region of the north-east trades came as a revelation. This, he felt, was to savor sea life at its finest. He had never wholly believed Old Zenas' tales of the incomparable blue of tropic waters, of the star-studded nights that were stranger than a legend. Old Zenas had been known on occasion to let imagination have free rein! And yet it was all true—and here he was, Nat Palmer of Stonington, like Christopher Columbus discovering a new world!

There was no need now to loose or set sail, to reef tops'l's or courses. Once in a watch, perhaps, there would be a small pull on the braces, or a halyard might want swaying off. That was all. Day and night, blow high, blow low, the brig fled southward, sailing a daily average of 240 miles.

The life within the teeming sea became an astonishing and varied spectacle. Portuguese men-of-war, fragile as bubbles, sailed blithely to whatever destruction the wind might have in store for them. At night, legions of small silvery fish played like moths under the glow of the brig's running lights; and out of the darkness into the circle of light shot giant cuttlefish—

living torpedoes too swift for any net to trap. They darted forward with long tentacles outstretched, and around the central mouth the tentacles opened, like a flower. Instantly a silver fish was snapped up and devoured before the monster shot backward into darkness and was gone.

Always and forever there were sharks nosing about the ship—rolling over to reveal a belly's dim gleam, or the rows of fearsome teeth: the very shape and form of evil. To a sailor, a shark is as a rattlesnake to a farmer—something to be killed whenever possible. Aboard the *Hersilia* the very word “shark” was a signal for all hands to line the bulwarks, eyes peering eagerly down into the water. A heavy iron hook baited with a chunk of salt horse was ever on hand for just such an emergency.

“There he is! See him?”

“Scuttle me, wot a brute! Must be twenty foot long—”

“Look at the fangs on 'im! I'll wager he could slice through a six-inch plank.”

The men speculated on the shark's length, its weight, the number of its teeth. Would it or wouldn't it take the hook? Why was it being so scary?

“It's yore ugly face what's scarin' him off.”

“By crimes, it's Cooky's salt horse he can't stomach. He's partic'lar, that shark is. Not like us pore sailors who ain't got no choice.”

“How's for you jumpin' overboard? A slice o' that fat hide of yours'd soon fetch him!”

“Too blasted tough.”

Warily the shark nosed up to the bait. It veered away and returned. Its inseparable escort of pilot fish followed its every movement with machinelike precision. The sailors believed that these small fish, known as remora, guided the shark to his food; the fact was, they kept him company in the hope of feeding off crumbs from the rich man’s table.

“Now he’s goin’ to take it!”

“Not him, he’s too foxy.”

“Ah, he’s got it, he’s got it!”

“Heave him up, lads! Heave ho—”

Four men were needed to haul the shark alongside. Nat Palmer managed to slip a running bowline over the brute’s tail during a brief letup in its struggles. Then, yelling like red Indians, the men hoisted the shark over the bulwarks and forward to the break of the foc’slehead, where it thrashed about in a fearsome way. In no gentle manner the mate ran a handspike down the monster’s throat, putting an end to its struggles. The shark measured sixteen feet from stem to stern; eight rows of jagged teeth were counted in its jaws. The tail was cut off and nailed to the end of the jib boom, to bring wind. But when Cooky sliced steaks from its rank meat and served them up at mess, no man would touch a mouthful.

“Don’t never eat shark meat,” Chips warned the boys. “Ye’ll be eatin’ yer dead comrades.”

But if sharks filled sailors with loathing, the appearance of a school of dolphins filled them with delight.

Such a school broke under the *Hersilia*'s bows one afternoon, forty or fifty shining bodies cavorting in a frolic of exuberance. Porpoises seemed to enjoy a ship's company, and often for days on end would play around a vessel.

At the top of his lungs Mr. Hazard was shouting: "Out on the bowsprit, one of you! Get a harpoon and bend a line to it. Fresh meat for all hands!"

The first man to try his hand at harpooning made a sorry job of it and the mate recalled him. "Come in, you old scow. You couldn't hit anything smaller than a sulphur-bottom whale."

The mate snatched the harpoon from the crestfallen sailor, and worked his way nimbly out on the bowsprit. With a quick plunge, he sank the iron deep into the back of the largest porpoise in the school. The eight-foot shaft splintered as it struck home, but the line held.

"Haul away!" shouted the mate. "Steaks for supper and sausages for breakfast. Out with your sheath knives, boys!"

The porpoise was quickly strung up from the yard-arm by the tail. Knives flashed as hungry men hacked steaks from flesh that was as darkly red as that of a newly butchered ox. Soroff, the Russian-Finn, cut out the porpoise's heart (which had barely ceased to quiver) and thrust it into his mouth as if it had been a mammoth oyster. This action, as Nat Palmer already had discovered, was in keeping with the man's general habits. Soroff ate or drank anything he could lay hands on—tallow, paraffin, or even colza oil from the binnacle.

He cared not whether meat was cooked or raw. From the beginning of the voyage Soroff had been looked upon askance by the rest of the foc'sle hands.

Supper that night was a gala meal, and afterward many a yarn was spun more true than those told in storybooks.

It was here in the trades that Stan and Joey began to learn something of the whole business of becoming seamen. In foreign ships, the common sailor was not encouraged to know anything about navigation. That was the concern of the officers. This was particularly true of the British Royal Navy, where only the sons of gentlemen could aspire to command. But in a rapidly growing merchant marine such as young America enjoyed, every boy before the mast had a good chance of one day becoming an officer if he worked hard enough for it.

On quiet nights, in the *Hersilia*'s after cabin, there were hours of study under Nat Palmer's exacting eye. The boys learned to work up the noon sights and, by way of practice, to write up entries for the log. Two logs were kept on shipboard: the official log of the captain, wherein details of hazard at sea, injury, death, trouble with the crew, etc., were entered; and the navigation log kept by the first mate, whose entries concerned winds, course, speed, and soundings taken. It was for this latter log that the boys were encouraged to practice.

"I'll make sailors of you yet," Nat promised. "No

more cows to milk, hay to pitch, rails to split. But you've got to learn to put a stout heart to a steep hill."

Stan Bendick was aglow with enthusiasm and certainty. During the past weeks he had gained immeasurably in self-confidence. "Was I *glad* when those chickens went overboard!" he chortled. "When the Old Man eats the last of the pigs, no more farmwork. Not for me, ever again! What do you say, Joey?"

But Joey was silent; there was a far-off look in his eyes. To Nat the boy said, "I was two degrees off in figuring the noon sights, sir. Could I work them up again?"

"You didn't answer Stan's question," Nat reminded him.

"I—I'd rather work up the noon sights again if you don't mind."

Stan's question remained unanswered.

Sometimes Captain Sheffield himself took a hand in the boys' instruction. The Old Man fairly crowded over any necessities of storm by day that enabled him to display his skill at double altitudes of fixed stars by night. And when for a span of days and nights no help had been possible from sun, moon, or stars, the captain's dead reckoning was faultless. He could have conned his ship, Nat Palmer sometimes thought, merely by the feel of the wind against his cheek. With the Old Man, a handful of degrees seemed less accurate than that sixth sense of the true sailor, which had its roots in his vast practical knowledge.

The sailmaker, like all old shellbacks, was ever ready to impart his own particular knowledge to the young apprentices. He taught them how to use the palm and needle, how to make a variety of knots, how to turn many different kinds of splices. Sails soon took pride in the way they were able to put complicated Turk's-heads on the handles of the buckets at the poop rail, and the skill with which they plaited mats to serve as chafing gear aloft.

In such manner, week after week, the two boys began to lay up a store of seafaring knowledge—a knowledge that someday only one of them would ever use.

For sixteen sapphire days the flying-fish weather held. Then, as the brig drew nearer to the equator, the wind dropped, turned fitful and quixotic. Pampered by days of inaction, the crew grumbled as they boxhauled the yards to catch every ripple of air. The sun burned down like an inescapable eye, scalding the decks, causing the pitch to bubble in the seams—exasperating to those whose shoes were being saved for cold weather.

Iron became too hot to touch. The heat below decks was unbearable. When flint and steel were struck to light a pipe, the flame burned steadily upward without a flicker.

At the merest suggestion of a puff of wind, the heavy yards would be dragged down to take advantage of it. No sooner had they been braced up than, as if in mockery of human effort, the false promise of a breeze would veer away and the exasperated officer of the watch

would give the weary order, "Stand by the weather forebrace," while the no less exasperated men hauled the yards round to the new tack.

Here was the region known to charts and mariners as "the area of calms and variables." More commonly, the "doldrums"—a baffling belt of weather where winds and currents followed no known laws, and the temper of a ship's crew could be strained to snapping point.

For some days before the *Hersilia* entered this region, the northeast trades had slackened, then finally disappeared. With them vanished the sparkling blue of sky and sea. The doldrum skies were sultry with thunderheads and fretted with flares of lightning, while the brig's masts seemed almost to scrape at the low-hanging clouds. The sails slatted and banged in the fickle airs—airs which at any moment could become a dangerous threat to a ship wearing full canvas. Lightning lit up the surrounding ocean to ghastly brilliance, and the earsplitting crashes that followed bespoke its nearness. Between crashes, so profound was the stillness that the ear buzzed with the silence. The sails sagged, dejected and inert, and the ship lay motionless, except as she drifted back and forth in the grip of some unknown current.

Not a quarter of a mile away, two whales heaved their hulks half out of the sea. With a long-drawn hissing, they spouted jets of watery vapor high into the air. So vast was their bulk, yet so leisurely their movement, that scarcely a ripple disturbed the glassy surface of the water as the leviathans submerged.

The Old Man was scanning the horizon to the east. A deep line cleft his brows as he handed his spyglass to Nat. "Tell me what you make of that, mister," he growled.

Nat swung the glass to his eye, following the direction of the captain's pointing finger. Into the circle of glass, many times magnified, appeared a vague point of cone-shaped, coppery cloud dropping to meet the horizon.

He handed back the glass, saying crisply: "Water-spout, I reckon, sir."

"Ever see one before?"

"Never. We don't have 'em in Long Island Sound."

"We may be getting more wind than we want, mister. Call all hands to stand by!"

Even without the aid of a glass, it could now be seen that the spout was growing rapidly into a formidable column of whirling water. It rose possibly two hundred feet up into the dead air. In a wind of its own creation, it seemed to be sweeping toward the *Hersilia*, moving at incredible speed. From half a mile's distance its eerie, soûghing roar could be clearly heard.

The air had become a vacuum. The brig slithered on an oily swell. Nearer and nearer rushed the water-spout, its outlines sharply defined against the low-hanging sky. The roar that accompanied it was rising up the scale in wild crescendo. So overwhelming, so breathtaking was the spectacle that those on board the *Hersilia* held their breath, as if by that involuntary action they might avert disaster. Men and officers alike

stood speechless. The whirling column possessed a fascination that held them in thrall. There was nothing, nothing to be done.

Of a sudden the brig heeled over, as if pushed and held down by a giant's hand. Her starboard rail touched the water. For one terrible moment, as the waterspout hung over her, all but toppling, she lay stricken and inert. There could be no escape! Then the roaring column of water veered sharply away, moving off into the empty spaces of the ocean as if at some unheard, celestial command. With its passing, the brig slowly righted, until she stood almost on even keel once more.

Mr. Hazard mopped the sweat from his brow. "We'll never have a closer call than that one," he said grimly.

Soroff, the Russian-Finn, muttered gloomily: "This ship, she is onlucky."

Furiously the mate turned upon him. "What was unlucky about that, I'd like to know? The spout passed us by, didn't it?"

"This time, yes. But next time—you see. Friday is onlucky day for sail."

"Clap a stop on your jaw tackle!" shouted the mate angrily. "What's the matter with ye, ye big ape? This ain't no funeral. Not yet, anyway!"

Many a black look and muttered word was cast in Soroff's direction. The day before, someone had seen him stick the blade of his knife into a mast. Devil take such a man! They brought bad luck to a ship, as any old hand could tell you.

Unexpectedly a few enormous drops of rain struck

at the glassy swells. The men stared at the rain, jaws agape, unbelieving—as if in a briny world of water they had almost forgotten that fresh water still existed. Then a deluge descended, a stinging torrent, a vertical curtain of water that drummed upon the decks and spat upward.

All hands plugged up the scuppers to let the decks fill with fresh water. All available buckets and pans were brought forth, even the pots in Cooky's galley were pressed into service. Long-forgotten scraps of soap materialized out of nowhere as the men yanked off their clothing, remembering the luxury of water, sweet water, against their parched bodies. They remembered laundry to be done—shirts and socks and pants that now could be scoured free of brine, rinsed clean of soap. Still the deluge descended, until water oozed from every pore of the ship and ropes swelled in the blocks, later to become unmanageable.

The area of calms and variables—here it was with a vengeance. At one moment the brig lay lifeless. The next, and she was driving ahead with lee rail buried while an anxious mate shouted, "All hands to shorten sail!"

For several days before crossing the equator, the foc'sle hands had been plaguing Stan and Joey with horrendous tales of the visit which Father Neptune was certain to make before the ship could cross the line. "Who's Father Neptune?" Joey wanted to know. "I

never heard tell of him back home. And how's he going to get here? We haven't sighted a ship in weeks—"

Raucous laughter greeted this guileless remark. Was there *ever* such a land-green lubber shipped to sea?

"Father Neptune is King o' the Ocean Wave, m'lad," Chips explained solemnly, "just like the King o' England. Only he's much more powerful. Every sea serpent, crab and polliwog does what he tells 'em to do."

"But why does he come aboard?" the boy persisted.

"To give blinkin' lubbers like ye and Stan a certificate to sail in his waters, that's why. It's like a mate gettin' his papers or like signin' on in the navy. It has to be done right and proper—all rolled snug with a harbor furl."

"Ho, there ain't any Father Neptune!" Stan scoffed. "You're just tryin' to scare us, Chips."

"Avast there!" came Chips' rebuke. "No Father Neptune, ye say? O-ho! He'll pay ye back fer that one, matey."

Nils Erikson took over. "Last voyage in the *Oslo* we had a boy who vas so *mean* ve fixed him good yet. Ve hoisted him to yardarm in bosun's chair. And ven ve had him hanging from yardarm, ve let him drop by the run—doused him in sea yet. Five times ve do dis."

"Did he—did he *die*?" breathed Joey.

"No, vorse luck! Even the sea—she didn't vant him."

That morning from ten to twelve, as the *Hersilia* crossed the equatorial line, it happened to be Stan's trick at the wheel. Joey was polishing the after-cabin brightwork. Nat Palmer suppressed a smile as he

watched the boys from the corner of his eye; he knew that for several days preparations had been afoot for the time-honored ceremony of welcoming Father Neptune aboard.

As the sun approached the meridian, the Old Man and Mr. Hazard as usual were occupied in taking independent sights. After working up his observation, the captain turned to his first officer. "Mister," he said, "we're just abaft the line. Send a hand aloft to report if there's anything in sight."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the solemn response.

Presently a voice rang out from the fore-t'gallant masthead: "Sail ho! Sail ho-o!"

"Where away?" shouted the Old Man.

"Dead ahead, sir. Bearing straight down on us."

"What's her rig?"

"Can't be sure, sir. It's oddlike!"

"Mr. Palmer, turn all hands to," barked the Old Man. "We'll receive our visitors on the foc'slehead. You, Stan—give the wheel to Mr. Hazard. As for you, Joey—that brightwork's bright enough. Get for'ard with the rest of the men."

A deep, sonorous voice seemed suddenly to boom from under the brig's very bows. "Ahoy! Brig ahoy!"

And the Old Man was answering: "Halloo-o!"

Again came the hollow-sounding voice which, somehow, bore a strange resemblance to the sailmaker's. "Any lubbers aboard this ship who are strangers to my domain?"

"Aye, there are, Father Neptune," said the Old Man.

“Two likely lads who are willing to lose their beards if you will give them a mate’s certificate to sail your waters.”

“I’m right glad to hear it, Cap’n,” answered Father Neptune. “I’ll step aboard and trim their beards fer ‘em in two shakes of a gull’s rudder.”

Joey and Stan fingered their downy chins uneasily.

Willing hands shoved the two boys unceremoniously forward while the rest of the crew set up a frightful din of clashing pots and pans. This was the signal for Father Neptune and his Court of “mermaids” and other sea creatures to climb up over the knightheads and stand on the foc’slehead, dripping wet. A blanket trimmed with gulfweed was draped over Neptune’s shoulders as a royal robe. Tufts of rope yarn, painted green, gave the costume an effect of eelgrass dredged straight up from the bottom of the sea. For a trident, the King carried in his right hand a five-pronged grains iron. His left hand held a speaking trumpet.

Mother Neptune presented an even more astonishing appearance than her regal spouse. A circle of kelp garlanded long blond locks that fell to “her” waist—locks of frayed hemp. Two painted circles of red lead lent a flush to the lady’s cheeks, and a gown of fish net covered her stalwart frame. Only the rolling, seagoing majesty of her gait resembled that of Nils Erikson.

So ludicrous was the appearance of the Sea King and his Queen that Joey, forgetting his apprehensions, burst into laughter.

"Avast heavin', m'lad!" thundered Neptune. "Yer downhaul needs attention and I'm o' a mind to do it myself." To the crew he barked: "Strait jackets fer the two o' 'em!"

Strips of sailcloth were quickly bound round the arms of the victims, reducing them to helplessness.

"Stand these lubbers on the forehatch fer inspection," came the command.

Father Neptune stalked majestically before the two lubbers, fixing them each in turn with the eyes hidden behind the mask holes. "Ye there," he boomed, "what's *yer* name?"

"Stan—Stan Bendick, sir."

"So! And are ye ready to join the Order o' the Sons o' Neptune?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well spoken, m'lad. But first yer scales must come off, and ye need a shave before ye can join my r'yal company."

Out of the corner of his eye, Stan discovered that all hands and the cook had taken seats around the capstan. The Old Man, flanked by Mr. Hazard and Nat Palmer, was grinning on the side lines.

"Blindfold these farmers!" Neptune commanded.

Strips of canvas were bound tightly over the boys' eyes, and they were commanded to sit down. Since they had noticed nothing resembling a bench, they fumbled around with one foot; but ropes had been thrown around their ankles, and their feet were uncere-

moniously jerked from under them. Both boys sat down hard—on a plank that had been placed on top of a water-filled tub.

“Give me my shaving tools,” ordered Neptune. “These blinkin’ lubbers needs a shave!”

Mother Neptune held Stan’s head in firm grip while her spouse daubed a tar-filled brush across the boy’s chin. “Have ye ever been shaved before, young fellow?” asked the Ocean King.

“No, sir,” came the respectful answer.

“What say?”

“No, sir,” the boy repeated.

“Louder!” boomed His Majesty. “My hearing ain’t so good.”

Whereupon Stan shouted, “No!”

Scarce had he opened his mouth when Father Neptune plunged the tarbrush down the boy’s throat, and Stan sputtered and gagged to the vast delight of the audience.

“Bring me my keen-edged razor,” said Neptune. “Is it well honed?”

“Ja! Sharp as a shark’s tooth yet,” Mother Neptune, in her best Swedish accent, assured her royal mate.

The old iron hoop of the “razor” had an edge like a bucksaw, and Father Neptune manipulated it in much the same manner. Stan’s face was scraped unmercifully, until it seemed to the boy as if the flesh were being flayed away.

When the ordeal had come to an end, Father Nep-

tune spoke sternly. "There is one pledge ye must swear, matey, if ye want to join my subjects. Do ye swear never to eat whale meat when ye can get seal?"

"I do."

"Speak louder, m'lad. There's a fog in my ears. Do ye swear never to walk when ye can swim?"

"Yes," Stan muttered, between tight lips.

"By crimes, I can't hear ye!" protested Father Neptune. "Give the lad my speaking trumpet so I can hear him. Do you promise never to drink salt water when ye can drink fresh?"

The speaking trumpet was forced between the boy's lips and into it he cried, "I do!" At the same instant a bucket of bilge was emptied down the horn. As Stan sputtered and gagged, half choked, he heard Neptune bellowing:

"Give the lad his passport!"

The plank on which he had been sitting was knocked from under him, and Stan found himself sprawling feet over ears in water. With hands and feet tied, he was unable to rise, a fact which only made more fun for the crew. Finally with a roll to leeward the boy managed to capsize the tub, which emptied itself and rolled across the deck.

The ordeal was over. The same hands that had initiated Stan so unmercifully, turned their attention upon Joey, who came through his own rough baptism with flying colors.

From that day on, both boys were accorded some-

thing of the respect which one true sailorman reserves for another. Their "passports," written in the labored script of Chips, the carpenter, read as follows:

To all sharks, whales, cuttlefish and mermaids, know ye that I did hold court aboard brig *Hersilia* in latitude 0° 00', longitude 44° 30' West. I hereby declare one Stan Bendick and one Joey Budd worthy subjects for my Domain. I hereby confer on them both the title—SHELLBACK, with perpetual right to navigate the waters of my Domain.

signed: *Neptune*

Stan was delighted with the outcome of his ordeal. But Joey was almost overwhelmed. "Golly, Stan," he breathed, "it says we're shellbacks. *Me*, a shellback!"



chapter 7

ST. ELMO'S FIRE

AFTER CROSSING the equator, the *Hersilia* picked up a lucky slant of wind that carried her through the doldrums straight into the gusty embrace of the southeast trades. At night, now, the Great Bear lay low on the horizon, while that fabled constellation known as the Southern Cross rose to the zenith.

The nights, too, were growing colder, and all hands were working in anticipation of the gales and seas of the Roaring Forties. In the watch below, the men were getting their gear in shape for the ugly weather that was surely lying in store for them. Gone was the blue of tropic sparkle, the benign and friendly airs. This sea

was lowering, this sea was stubborn—determined to give the *Hersilia* a taste of sterner stuff.

Now there was a searching chill to the wind which was harsh to those accustomed to the southeast trades. It set the men shivering in their thin clothing. Sea chests were uncorded, woolen jackets and knitted vests brought to light. Men cursed as they tumbled out for their watch, clopping and awkward in sodden boots.

Flying fish vanished with the porpoise and the shark; but coming on deck one morning, Nat Palmer discovered that the brig no longer was alone on an empty, wind-swept sea. For high overhead the first wandering albatross was wheeling against the sky. From the upper Patagonian coast on the Atlantic to the same latitude on the Pacific, these birds formed a ship's convoy in sunshine or whistling gale. Ever since he was a small boy, Nat had heard tell of these truly wonderful birds, but nothing he had been told prepared him for the miracle of their flight.

The stiffer the wind, the more supreme was the albatrosses' mastery of the air. They could float and wheel on wings widespread and motionless, save for a scarcely perceptible tilt to lift or lower their elevation. They could run athwart a gale of 80-mile velocity, take it head on, or hang suspended without apparent effort.

As Nat Palmer followed, with wondering eyes, the bird circling so far above him, it swept downward and hovered just above the brig's masthead. The only movement of its body was in the gentle, questing eye—so seemingly human that it appeared to bear out the claim

of the old shellbacks, that the body of the albatross housed the souls of drowned sailors and, if the bird were killed, its wandering ghost would dog the footsteps of him who harmed it.

Chips joined Nat at the rail. "A real purty sight, that bird," the old carpenter grunted. "But if ye was to fall overboard, that albatross would peck yer eyes out. Handsome is as handsome does, I always say. Besides, when ye sight yer fust albatross, old Cape Stiff is jest around the corner."

Erikson knew a way of catching these birds without harming them. He whittled a sharp wooden triangle and impaled a piece of salt horse on one point. Then he attached the triangle to a stout line and threw it overboard. When the albatross snatched at the bait, the Swede gave a sharp tug on the line. Instantly the triangle became wedged in the great bird's beak, and the albatross was hauled aboard.

On deck it was helpless, powerless to take off from a flat surface. It strutted about, stiff and ungainly, robbed of the grace it wore as a birthright when aloft in the skies. Dodging the powerful beak that could inflict a nasty bite, Erikson seized the struggling bird and threw it back into the sea. There, with a comical expression of surprise on its face, the albatross paddled about, settling its ruffled feathers. All composed again and heading into the wind, it rose upward, up and up—once more a white angel of grace.

Chips frowned, too, at the first of Mother Carey's chickens. In mottled jackets of black and white, these

little birds darted with quick-flitting movement over the surface of the sea. Their slim trailing legs made them seem almost to be walking on water. "Perky little critters," Chips agreed, "but they bring dirty weather in their wake."

The first wandering albatross was soon joined by hundreds of other travelers. Young albatrosses, with slaty markings, made smaller and less skilful arcs around the ship. Smoky-gray sooty albatrosses joined their ranks. Speckled Cape pigeons, always busy in their flight, settled restlessly on the water before hurrying on. Flocks of blue whalebirds—*blåufugler*, Erikson called them—skimmed about the middle distance, giving the ship a wary berth. More often than before rose the spout of the whale, followed by the ponderous ease of a long-curving bulk. This part of the sea swarmed with minute life; here were the true pastures of the ocean, which every spring burst into activity, so that the surface became filled with myriads of floating, drifting organisms which fed all the birds, dolphins and whales that took their pastime there.

The *Hersilia* was in the Roaring Forties at last. There, between the latitudes 40° and 50° S., for nine months of the year the great westerlies blow true to their name. Their direction never varies, but their strength rises gradually to hurricane fury. For thousands of miles there is nothing to deflect the power of the league-long seas.

The time had come to change, once again, the brig's

complete suit of sails—to replace fair-weather canvas with the heavier fabric of Number 1. With all hands on deck, including Cooky and the carpenter, the job required a full day's labor with no watch below.

That night in the half deck, Chips growled as he wrung water out of his beard. "I tell ye," he said, "I'm through with the sea. A man o' my age ought to be settin' in front o' the fire, fillin' his pipe and his bread-basket. And here's me, froze to the bone and eatin' scraps ye wouldn't throw to a dog! That time I got married down to Cape Town—Liz, her name was. I *think* it was Liz. . . . Anyway, she says to me, 'Ye'll always be a good-fer-nothin' fly-by-night, without a proper pillow to rest yer empty head on.' And by crimes, it looks as if Liz was right."

"Why don't you go back to Cape Town," Nat suggested, "and renew acquaintance with Liz. She sounds to me like a real sensible woman."

Chips blew a puff of smoke at the ceiling, silent for a moment. "Wel-l," he said at last, "come to think o' it, mebbe a sea life ain't as bad as some others."

With the crossing of the 45th parallel, the weather broke up. The cold was more searching, the wind shrilled a keener note. The *Hersilia* had become the moving center of a watery world desolate and forsaken by God. Even the sea birds had fled. Waves that were stubbornly sullen pressed down upon the brig, to overtake and destroy her if they could. They passed—thwarted this one time as they rushed forward under

the counter. But always there were fresh and stronger waves returning to take their places, league-long and without apparent end. As far as the eye could reach, the mountain ranges of the sea lifted and fell, lifted and fell under an inexorable sky.

The men rarely undressed, preferring to turn in all standing. Water was everywhere, seeping through bulkheads, sloshing across the floor. It dripped into the bunks, onto tired bodies that snatched at slumber. The cabin reeked with the dankness of wet clothing and weary humanity. Nothing beyond the galley was dry. Dominating even the howl of the wind was the pandemonium of creaking blocks, straining cordage, slatting sails. The brig's hull groaned in every beam and stanchion. Every object not securely lashed in half deck or foc'sle, shifted back and forth with the pitch of the ship. Buckets, sea chests, brooms, shoes, mugs, all went sliding and clattering about as the *Hersilia* rolled until it seemed as if the tips of her yardarms would scoop the sea.

To Joey Budd, the days had a quality of nightmare. The Old Man had assigned him to the relatively easy job of lamp trimmer: relighting the binnacle lamp on the quarter-deck when it was blown out, as so frequently happened; seeing to the running side lights and stern light, as well as all the hand lanterns. Joey's willingness to undertake any assignment had finally won him the admiration of all hands, even though they continued to berate him for his clumsiness aloft. But the unceasing clamor of the belabored ship had frayed the

boy's jangling nerves. During the hours of his watch on deck, he moved as in a trance. At night, sleep for him was impossible. Although he jammed his knees and back against either side of the bunk, nothing could stop that infernal shifting of the body in obedience to the brig's plunging roll. Black and blue from head to foot, Joey's body seemed to be all bones and hollows.

Stan Bendick, on the other hand, had flourished during these weeks at sea. His wiry body was as tough as new hemp, and it seemed to Nat Palmer that the boy had grown a full two inches. A low or aloft Stan was now at home, moving with an ease and self-confidence that, somehow, had driven a wedge between the friendship of the two boys. Stan had become impatient with Joey's maladjustment to a life at sea. A realization of this fact only added to the sum of the younger boy's miseries.

One hundred and fifty miles west-southwest lay Cape Horn. When Nat Palmer and his watch came on deck at midnight, it looked as if the *Hersilia* were in for a proper baptism.

"Cape Horn snorter," Chips grumbled. "That's what we're in fer. Them blasted Mother Carey's chickens—never knowed it to fail!"

Soroff's bearded face set in a scowl even darker than usual. "This onlucky ship," he muttered, "she will kill us all. You will see."

"Ah, ye and yer sour mouth! Why don't ye shut up?"

All that afternoon the wind had been freshening to gale force. At times, in response to a sharper gust, the brig staggered under the tremendous pressure of her canvas while a line of foam-flecked water cascaded over the almost submerged lee bulwarks. The wildly swaying mastheads seemed almost to touch the dense banks of storm clouds that pressed down upon the laboring ship. Spray edged with ice lashed like whips at the men's faces, froze on shrouds and ratlines. Life lines were rigged fore and aft for the men's protection. Joey Budd was hard put to keep the flame burning in the binnacle lamp.

Nat Palmer wedged himself into a corner of the poop rail and let the brig rip. Watching every blast of wind and sea he gauged the ship's response, as men on shore follow the momentous changes of fortune. The hands stood huddled under the break of the poop, expecting at any moment a call to action. They had not long to wait.

"Stand by your stays'l halyards!" Nat cupped his hands to shout. Then, as the brig heeled to a sharper angle: "Let go! Aft here and brail in the spanker!"

Like a voice from another planet, Erikson's accented voice echoed: "Brail in der spanker—" and the Swede sprang to the pinrail to throw off the coils.

"Lee brails, men! Clear that outhaul! Let go your gaff-tops'l halyards—"

The squall struck again, and under its press the rigging twanged like the strings of a harp. Cursing the gale and the rain and their own foul luck, the men

searched in darkness for the proper sheets to spill the wind from straining canvas. But, in the moment of snuggling the sail down to the mast, there came a loud report from for'ard—a pounding of broken chain like a volley of shot.

“Forer’yal’s gone!” came the lookout’s shout.

There came the instantaneous reply: “Let go the r’yal halyards!” Anticipating the order, the men already had dashed forward, and the yard came down on the run. At the same moment the fore-t’gallant sail split with a roar. It bellied and thrashed like a banner, yanked wildly at the boltropes which confined it. In the space of seconds it was shredded to ribbons, whirled off into darkness on the back of the wind. And Nat was bellowing: “T’gallant halyards! Tail onto it, men, or we’ll carry the papers to Davy Jones!”

But even as the fall whirred through the sheaves, they heard a pounding rattle from the blackness of the bows, and the lookout’s voice crying: “Inner jib . . . carried away—”

The brig was trembling to her keelson, a shuddering quiver like some muscular convulsion that lent her a semblance of human life in great distress.

“You, Stan,” Nat shouted, “tumble up the watch below. And hang onto that life line! You, Joey, call the Old Man—”

But the Old Man was already there, his big body braced beside the helmsmen as he conned his ship by the sweep of the seas. Peering ahead into darkness, forward leaning against the press of wind, Captain

Sheffield in that moment seemed less a being of human stature than a natural force which partook of the elements themselves. Nat Palmer, as every other man aboard, always felt easier with the Old Man on the quarter-deck.

Stan Bendick fought his way for'ard, clinging to the life line. Water swirled about him thigh-deep. He gained the foc'sle door, wrenched it open.

"All hands to shorten sail!" the boy yelled, his voice cracking with excitement. "Tumble out, men, lively!"

A chorus of groans greeted him. "Close that door, you swab! We're swamped! I'll wring your blasted little neck!"

"Captain's orders— Tumble out, men! There's the devil to pay—"

Already the men, still half gone in sleep, were fumbling into wet clothing and sea boots. They shoved past the boy in the doorway, into the full surge of a heavy sea sweeping over the break of the foc'sle deck. It sped them aft like chips on a millrace. Forked lightning with ghastly brilliance bared the scene. Ropes, swept from the pinrails, streamed in wild confusion across the deck.

Mr. Hazard, holding on to windward of the main-mast, was shouting: "Aloft, men! Secure tops'l's—"

Sail and gear were thrashing in the darkness aloft, the noise of their thunder lost in the storm. The men sprang into the shrouds, flattening themselves against the rigging. The ratlines were treacherous with ice; hail pelted at the climbing figures. The men of Nat Palmer's

watch joined those of the mate on the tops'l yards. Edging out on the icy footropes, they clung to the wildly swaying spars. A blinding flash of lightning revealed drawn faces, tense bodies desperately hugging the yard. Half-frozen fingers grasped at loosened gaskets, instinctively passing them about the sail, catching turns, heaving in.

Somewhere a gasket parted. The sail broke loose with a roar. A voice yelled: "Fire and brimstone!"

The men—bent double over the yard, holding on by stomach muscles alone—fought to smother that perilous bulge of sail.

"All together now—ho-o-o-o!"

Erikson, ever his best in stormy weather, was throwing his great strength into the battle. His blond hair streamed in the wind. His face was contorted in a grimace of effort as, inch by inch, the fighting canvas was mastered. Now the men were sliding out on the lee end of the yardarm to finish the job. The brace had slackened and the yard swung low as the ship heeled over before a mightier blast. A swirl of livid water rose up almost to the Flemish horse, reaching with hungry fingers for the human limpets that clung so desperately to their precarious hold.

There, the job was finished! Slowly the men worked back into the slings of the yard; they were climbing down the futtocks, hands and feet reaching instinctively for the proper hold.

Scarcely had they reached the deck when the order came to furl the mainsail. The wind had doubled back

on itself, striking in blasts without interruption. With each attack, it seemed not only to check but actually to drive back the brig on her plotted course. The first mate eased the sheet as Nat Palmer fought his way over to the tack, ready to let go as soon as the clew garnet and buntlines were manned. The mate flung a look toward the commanding figure on the quarter-deck. "All ready, sir—"

"Let go!" The Old Man's voice triumphed over wind and wave. Then, as the tack slipped: "Haul away!"

The tack whipped round the crosstrees. The main-sail ballooned, thrashed, while all hands hauled frenziedly at the spilling lines, one purpose powering them all: to master the sail before it carried away.

At that second the moon, which had been obscured by a blanket of cloud, broke through a rift to reveal an ominous waste of moving waters. Almost simultaneously the Old Man was shouting above the uproar:

"Let everything stand! Hang on for your lives!"

For one mad instant as the men flung a look aft, they saw a giant sea gathering size and weight and fury. Many they had seen before, but this was the grandfather of them all. It seemed to rise up and up, until its crest scraped the sky.

The men leaped into the shrouds, scrambled aloft. They clung with buried heads and fear in their souls. The captain sprang to lend his strength at the wheel. The brig slid down into an enormous hollow. Through

Nat Palmer's mind flashed the thought: We're done for. The old bucket's gone.

The giant wave was almost upon them. Its crest heaved over with a vast sigh. Down it crashed. *Chaos!* It struck the poop and rushed forward with the impetuosity of a burst dam. Everything was carried before it. Looking down from his perch in the rigging, Nat saw that the entire ship was momentarily submerged. The black poles of her masts careened wildly in a welter of water. Then, as the wave passed, he saw the figures of the Old Man and the two helmsmen bent with arms locked into the spokes of the bucking wheel.

All the ropes that the men had let go when they sprang to safety were thrashing wildly in the wind. The sail took charge. With a roar like a frigate's broadside it pounded and snapped, then split from earring to earring a foot below the jackstay. The shredded canvas disappeared into the sea to windward.

"Mr. Palmer," ordered the Old Man, "get for'ard and see what damage has been done. Mr. Hazard, tell Chips to sound the pump wells and report to me."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Minutes later, Nat returned to the quarter-deck to report that all the lifeboats except one had been carried away. The heavy davits, buckled and twisted, indicated the direction in which they had vanished. In tight-lipped silence the Old Man received word of this calamity.

What force it was, what power outside his will that drew his gaze upward, Nat Palmer never knew. But in the upper ethers he beheld a ghastly phenomenon of the sea, and one to quake the stoutest heart: the *corposant*. From the boom iron of each uptilted weather yard of the mainmast, it appeared as a brush of bluish fire. Every eye was drawn toward it, men and officers alike. It held them tranced, touched with a sense of awe.

The ball of fire moved in toward the mainmast. There it exploded noiselessly, leaped to the zenith and expired. St. Elmo's fire. . . . Even as the men watched, another globe of great size appeared at the main-truck. Everything within the corona of its flame flickered with pallid ghastliness. It moved down the mast to the t'gallant crosstrees, emitting a fizzing, crackling sound, as though the timber from which it streamed were on fire.

Nat Palmer heard the sailmaker's voice, shaky with dread, muttering hoarsely: "St. Elmo's fire. . . . Death follows it certain, like a cart after a horse!"

Scarcely had the *corposant* disappeared, when a second incident took place that impressed itself upon the least imaginative of the men. For days there had been no sign of life in sea or sky—no spout of whale or whirling wing. But suddenly a lone albatross appeared out of the murk, floating serenely a few feet from the brig's lee bulwarks. It turned its head from side to side as its gentle, questing eye passed over the ship's company. Then, with speed of light, the bird swooped upward on some current of the wind—up, up, to disappear into the dark shroud of the sky.

The Russian-Finn was the first to speak. What Soroff said no one understood, for the words were in some language strange to their knowing. But when the man made a gesture as if to cross himself, they knew it for a sign to ward off evil.

Throughout that wild night, the storm raged. Not until daybreak was the last man ordered down from aloft, the command given to relieve wheel and lookout. For the first time in his nineteen years, Nat Palmer felt exhausted in every nerve and muscle. He ached to tumble into his bunk, to sleep and sleep.

Erikson tugged at his arm. The Swede's face, usually so impassive, wore a haggard look. "It's der kid, sir—" he stammered. "He's gone!"

A sickness went through Nat. "What kid?" he cried out sharply. "What are you saying?"

"Ve took der count, sir. Joey's not here!"

"I saw him," Soroff cried, in hollow tone. "When wave struck—he was in the shrouds. He lost hold. The sea, she carry him under crab winch. This onlucky ship, she will kill us all!"

They found Joey jammed under the winch, unconscious. He was breathing in quick, short gasps. His face looked paper-white in the dawn. The men leaned forward, their big awkward hands outstretched to help Joey, their shipmate, the thirteen-year-old boy who never should have gone to sea.

"Make way, men," Nat muttered. "Stand aside. This is my job." He stooped to lift the slight, curiously inert figure. And a terrible realization swept through Nat

Palmer, forcing the words from his lips before he could check them: "His back—it's broken."

He carried the limp body as gently as if it had been a newborn babe, and laid it in Joey's bunk in the half deck. Around him, the men's faces blurred and swam in the wan light—bearded, rough, uncouth faces, for the space of a moment softened, touched with wonder and with awe. There was nothing any man could do for Joey now. He was beyond reach of mortal aid.

Only once did the boy regain consciousness, and then only for a few seconds. His eyes half opened, in their depths a wistful look—as if he were setting out on a long journey and could not bring himself to say good-by to these men who stood, so big and awkward and silent, staring down at him.

"I—I can hear it . . ." Joey murmured, the words trailing to a whisper.

"Hear what, boy?" Nat asked, leaning close. His throat felt tight, his eyes stung.

"The rain," came the whisper. "On the roof . . . the attic . . . home . . ."

An hour later, Joey's spirit—like the solitary wandering albatross—went winging its way alone beneath the lowering skies south of Cape Horn.



chapter 8

THE STRAIT OF LE MAIRE

THE WIND had blown itself away into the empty spaces of the world, but dark swells still ran high beneath a sky that was swept by scudding clouds.

The *Hersilia* lay hove to, as remote from the earth and as lonely as a planet. With tightly furled canvas, her stark yards and spars swung bleakly through space. Behind a weather-cloth that had been rigged as protection against the bitter edge of the wind, all hands gathered in a huddle amidships. Bareheaded, fidgeting with woolen caps, the men stared self-consciously down at their boots, avoiding one another's eyes. They moved only in order to maintain balance with the movement

of the ship. Spray stung their weathered faces, ran down their cheeks like tears. What had happened to Joey Budd could have happened to any one of them; and a realization of this fact drew them together in the solidarity which men instinctively reach for in the face of disaster. Men who had been enemies, who had bickered and fought one another, at this moment drew warmth and reassurance from the nearness of their fellows.

Instinctively, with a sort of childlike faith, their eyes sought the captain—master of their lives, ruler of their destinies. They turned to him as children turn to a wise and benevolent father who knows the solution to the riddles that perplex them.

The Old Man faced them, opened a mildewed Bible. The wind whipped its pages, and he sealed them down with the thumb of each hand. Stern lines carved his face—the face of a ship's figurehead hewn from elm, and the Old Man's body was as straight and unbending as the mainmast of a ship.

As 6 bells struck, the door of the half deck opened and Nat Palmer emerged. He was carrying in his arms a canvas-wrapped bundle, pathetically small. The bundle was bound with hemp and covered by a flag whose faded stripes and tattered spangle of stars tossed uneasily in the wind. Waiting at the bulwarks stood Chips and the sailmaker, balancing between them a wooden grating. They looked expectantly at Nat Palmer who, with no heart for the task assigned to him, was advancing toward them.

The captain began to read the solemn, rolling words of the burial service. His voice, accustomed as it was to dominating wind and wave, rose above the sound of the elements, in hoarse counterpoint to the eternal dirge of the sea: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. . . ."

Noble, majestic words. When heard on land, immeasurably moving. But heard at sea, they struck deep down into the fundament of every man's being, reminding him of his aloneness on earth, of the remorseless cruelty of the sea, of the briefness of life's mortal span.

Stan Bendick stood with head upflung, eyes unseeing. The boy was trying to remember that he was now a man among men, and that men don't cry. But it took all his will power to stifle the sob that rose involuntarily in his throat. Sails was remembering that he had stitched with palm and needle this canvas shroud, weighting it with lead against its long, long journey. Nat was remembering how doggedly, how gamely Joey had tried—pitting his frailness, his meager strength against hopeless odds, but always trying. Nils Erikson's broad face was contorted, as a child's face contorts in an effort at control. Soroff's dark-brooding eyes stared beyond the huddled figures, into some other world that only he could know. His lips moved soundlessly.

The Old Man's voice was saying: "We therefore commit this body to the Deep, to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body, when the sea shall give up her dead, and the life of the world to come. . . ."

Chips and the sailmaker tilted up the grating. Nat Palmer drew away the tattered flag as the captain cried: "May God's smile bless you, Joey Budd—and good-by!"

The weighted shroud slid out into space. Dark waters parted to receive it. Far overhead, an albatross circled on outstretched, motionless wings. And a concerted sound that might have been a sigh emerged from the lips of the men assembled.

A moment of absolute silence followed.

Then the captain barked out sharply: "Mr. Hazard, shake out the t'gants and tops'l's! Mr. Palmer, I'll have jibs and spanker set! Lively, men! Cape Stiff is just around the corner!"

The carpenter reported that he had succeeded in obtaining soundings. His rod revealed two feet eight inches of water below.

"Two feet eight inches!" the Old Man exploded. "Are you certain there's no mistake?"

"There's no mistake, sir," Chips retorted, a hint of reproach in his tone. "I stuck a piece of hose into the sounding pipe and lowered the rod down through it. Four times I tried it. Every time the same—two feet eight inches."

Here was a situation of utmost gravity. For three days it had been impossible to take a sight, hence the *Hersilia*'s exact position was uncertain. Roughly, she was about a thousand miles from the Falkland Islands. Until she could be beached and careened, it would be impossible to ascertain the extent of damage she had

suffered during the storm; but the amount of water in her hold meant manning the pumps on a 24-hour schedule. In addition to working ship, no crew could withstand such punishment for long.

The alternative was to beat through Le Maire Strait—those treacherous waters separating the eastern tip of Tierra del Fuego from the western shore of Staten Land—and to lay a course for the group of islands of which Cape Horn was the southernmost. This group consisted of eight main islands, the one known as “Hermite” offering the safest anchorage. St. Martin’s Cove, as this anchorage was called, was not marked on Captain Sheffield’s chart of the region; but Hermite Island itself was indicated as lying some fifteen miles north of Cape Horn.

To attempt to reach such an uncertain anchorage, in a leaking ship, in a region notorious for storms, would mean taking a long chance. It was, however, the lesser of two long chances.

Neither the Old Man nor his first mate had ever laid eye on Hermite Island. Of the entire crew, only Chips claimed firsthand knowledge of the place. Under circumstances similar to those prevailing, the old carpenter claimed to have gone ashore at St. Martin’s Cove some years before.

Overruling his first mate’s objection, the Old Man made his decision: he would stand through the Strait of Le Maire and try to find the promised refuge.

“If you ask me,” grumbled Mr. Hazard, always sullen when his will was opposed, “it’s folly to try to

weather the strait with a nor'east wind on our tail. And supposin' we *do* beat past St. John's Point and get through the strait, what's to prove we'll ever be able to slip up behind the Horn without founderin'?"

"Don't bother me with old woman's talk," the captain rasped. "A man who expects to die in bed should never ship to sea. Send a hand to the main r'yal yard, mister. Unless I'm off soundings, we'll raise Staten Land within the hour."

At a curt nod from the mate, Stan Bendick sprang up the main Jacob's ladder and onto the ratlines, climbing like a monkey. Nat watched the boy as he swung out over the futtock shrouds, up the topmast rigging, in through the horns of the crosstrees, then on up the t'gallant to the royal. How different from the greenstick boy who, only a few weeks before, had made his first trembling climb aloft!

"Aloft up there! What do you see?"

Far to the south, Stan beheld a faint blue streak that might have been land. Or could it be only a cloud? After so many days and nights at sea, the boy had almost forgotten what land looked like. He brought his sight to bear again upon the horizon, and then his triumphant shout hailed the deck:

"Land ho!"

"Where away?"

"One point on the weather bow, sir!"

"All right, down from aloft!"

By noon, the bold shores of Staten Land were visible from the deck.

"Cap'n," the first mate objected, "this nor'east wind's not going to last. Look at those clouds on our port beam! You're not going to try to run through the strait under such conditions—?"

"Do you expect me to run *from* it, mister?" the Old Man demanded, scornfully. "With nigh three feet of water in the wells, we haven't much choice. We'll weather that strait or go to perdition in the same bucket."

"That's right," came the mate's angry response. "If we go, you go, too, remember!"

"Belay that clatter, mister! This wind is changing. Right now it isn't more than a point abaft the beam. It'll reach further before it steadies."

"But, I tell you—"

"Enough! Haul the weather fore and main braces tight! Clew up the r'yals and stow the flying jib!" With contempt the Old Man dismissed his first mate and swung toward the helmsman. "Steer full and by," he barked.

"Full and by it is, sir—"

The wind was now already before the beam, and for the first time Nat Palmer wondered whether Mr. Hazard's objection might not be well-grounded. Could the brig successfully weather St. John's Point—the eastern tip of Staten Land? Countless ships had piled up on that graveyard of a coast since the age of its discovery, and the *Hersilia* might add one more name to an already long list. But the captain's commanding assurance put new heart into the faltering, and for the

first time in days the crew broke into a chantey as they swigged away on the braces and tautened with well-stretched halyards every scrap of canvas.

The afternoon wore on without any change in the wind's pressure. On the quarter-deck the Old Man scanned the horizon through his glass; only the deep crease between his brows indicated his concern. Before night closed down, the jagged tops of mountains could be clearly seen—like uneven teeth in a broken jaw—gray and ominous against the darkening sky.

At 1 bell in the morning watch, in an east-by-south gale, the *Hersilia* was racing for St. John's Point at an eight-knot pace. The first mate was chewing his underlip nervously, and something of the man's emotion communicated itself to the crew. Visibility was limited to five miles, and a halfhearted sun barely lightened a slate-colored sky. Uncharted reefs lay to the north of Staten Land—doom to any ship which ran afoul them. Not one captain in a hundred would have ventured to clear the entrance of Le Maire Strait under such adverse conditions. But James P. Sheffield was that one man.

Nat Palmer's admiration for the captain's skill and courage was unbounded. He knew the Old Man to be daring, even reckless, but never foolhardy. However, even the most able navigator could make an error of judgment in a region where winds, tides and currents defied all known laws. And as Nat watched the distant surf smashing against the black cliffs of Staten Land,

he found his body tensing as if to meet an actual physical threat.

The first mate's face had paled to a sickly yellow. "By crimes, Cap'n," the man stammered, "look at those cliffs to leeward! You want to kill us all? Let me give the order to wear ship—*now*, before it's too late!"

"Wear ship, you say?" the Old Man thundered. "We're going to weather that point, I tell you, if only by the length of a yardarm!"

The foremasthands were huddled in the lee of the foc'slehead, eyes trained anxiously upon the looming land. The mate's doubts, so openly expressed for all to hear, had momentarily unsettled them. *Did* the Old Man know what he was doing? Already the brig was leaking like a basket. How much more of a pounding could she take?

The *Hersilia* bucked and plunged into the wild seas that rushed to meet her. The final moment for wearing ship and beating a retreat had come and gone. There was now nothing to do but stand on and meet whatever fate might hold in store. The jagged headlands loomed closer, ever closer, ominous against the sky. At their base, surf was bursting with a thunderous roar. It was a spine-tingling moment and one to put the fear of God into the stoutest soul.

"Mr. Palmer," the captain bellowed above the wind, "tell all hands to hang on for their lives! We'll clear that point, but we'll get a proper ducking. Mr. Hazard, put another man at the wheel!"

The ramparts of the shore, now truly terrifying to behold, were less than a cable's length away. Presently they were abeam.

“At the wheel there—watch that helm!”

Giant seas, smashing against the rocky walls and recoiling, buried the brig's decks in a welter of foam. Green water piled aboard and rushed out the scuppers. The *Hersilia* pitched like a cockleshell on a millrace. The hands clung like limpets to the rigging, blinded, half-smothered by spray.

To the helmsman the Old Man was shouting: “Keep her off three points!”

“Off three points, sir—”

“Another point!”

“Another point, sir—!”

There was one moment when it seemed as if the *Hersilia* had met her end. Murderous cross seas swept her fore and aft, burying her decks under tons of water. The galley was washed out. The half deck was afloat. Through a gape torn in the bulwarks, all loose gear went streaming to leeward, into the sea. Long lines of sleet, like two-edged blades, struck at the ship. The noise was appalling; no shouted command could be heard above it. If a hatch cover should give way beneath the battering-ram of the seas, if a single plank should start, the brig was doomed. Sea after sea she took from end to end; but always the belabored ship came back for more.

“At the wheel there, port your helm—keep her away another point—”

As soon as the *Hersilia* steadied on her new course, the wind fell abaft the beam. The pressure on the laboring ship eased. The Old Man turned triumphantly to his first mate whose face, by now, was an ashy gray.

“I’ll be squaring away in five minutes, mister!” Jubilance rang in the captain’s voice. “Shake out that mains’l! Loose for’ard and main t’gallant sails! Square the cro’jik yards!” Then to the helmsman: “Away another point—”

“Another point it is, sir—”

Thus the *Hersilia*, one ship in five hundred, weathered the treacherous point so dreaded by navigators. With a spanking wind from the east swelling sail after sail drum-taut, the brig squared away from Hermite Island only twenty miles distant, and fifteen miles north of Cape Horn.

Nat Palmer turned to the weary, gaunt men huddled in the wreckage of the waist. “Three cheers for the Old Man, mates,” he urged. “You’ll never know his like again!”

Instantly a hoarse but heartfelt cheer rose above the beating thunder of wind and sea. The Old Man—he had brought them through! Three cheers—and again three cheers!

Mr. Hazard stomped below.

The *Hersilia* was tacking warily along the forbidding western shore of Hermite. Dead astern lay the island known as Herschell, to port the lofty bulk of Wollaston. On the starboard quarter, not fifteen miles

distant, reared the jagged, cloven peak of Cape Horn itself. Aeons ago, in some violent convulsion of nature, these fragments of earth and rock had become detached from the mainland. They stood remote and repellent, albeit with a certain lonely grandeur.

Soundings taken in the pump well, at regular intervals throughout the day, revealed steadily rising water in the brig's hold. The crew was near a point of exhaustion. It was imperative to reach, at the earliest possible moment, the refuge of St. Martin's Cove.

Chips, stationed in the bows with Nat Palmer, was scanning the shore line anxiously with the captain's spyglass. Mr. Hazard was muttering uneasily, half to himself: "If a sou'west gale springs up we're done for—trapped like rats."

"Let a sou'wester come," Chips retorted. "We'll drop the mud hook in a harbor where a dozen gales can't reach her. Jest around that headland is St. Martin's. Ye'll see! We've reached the end of Ameriky, that's wot it is!"

"Just so it ain't the end of us," the mate snapped.

Tremendous ground swells were running—the swells of the Pacific Ocean. Dun-colored fulmar gulls, every known species of petrel added their raucous cries to the pandemonium of surf and wind.

It called for a stout heart to approach such a forbidding and uncharted coast. As the brig drew closer and closer to the shore, the seas breaking on its tooth-like rocks, the hollow roar that trembled in the air grew in volume and intensity. And the emotion in-

spired by such a sight raised a doubt as to whether or not the brig—once she was so far into a bight as to render wearing ship impossible—could weather the headland. Anxiety stamped every face. Already an adverse current was setting the ship to leeward, bodily toward the rocks.

“Cape Hatteras is a place of refuge compared to this one,” muttered Mr. Hazard. “I hope that old fool carpenter knows what he’s up to.”

Spray filled the air like driving rain, and at times the rocky headland, so terrifyingly close, was hidden from view by the vapors—a devilish fusion of mist and spray and fog. Now the *Hersilia* was less than an eighth of a mile to windward of the point she was fighting to clear.

“You’re sure you remember this coast, Chips?” Nat questioned, tersely.

“There’s safe anchorage around that point,” the other insisted, “and ye can lay to that. I know wot I’m doin’!”

“But the drift is setting us mighty close to that point,” Nat objected.

“I know it, lad, but we’ve got to stand on. It’s our only chance.”

As the brig came abreast of the rocky headland, with a seaman’s born instinct Nat noted the first change. “She’s feeling an undertow,” he cried, his voice tight. Glancing aft, he discovered that the Old Man himself was at the wheel, keeping it well up, as if the brig were meeting with great resistance. The truth flashed upon

him. "God be praised!" he exulted. "We've caught the ebb under our lee!"

Instead of setting to leeward and being dashed upon the rocks, the brig was responding to a five-knot tide that hawsed her up to windward with irresistible force. As if only too conscious of the danger she had so barely escaped, the *Hersilia* recoiled from the rocks and shot ahead, rounding the point which, only a moment before, appeared to have been created solely for the purpose of destroying her. The dangerous headland had been safely doubled at a distance of a hundred fathoms.

A sigh of relief burst from the foc'sle hands, gathered amidships.

"We've made it, mateys. Old Chips—good old Chips!"

"Gor', I thought we was done for!"

"We're not out of this yet, me bucko!"

"Ah, belay that gab! What we did once we can do again, can't we?"

Weary and sore beset, the *Hersilia* luffed up into a spacious cove. A cast of the lead disclosed fifty fathoms and a bottom of mud. With the assurance that his anchors would hold in such a bottom, the captain made a flying moor and payed out enough cable to render the vessel secure.

Only then did he speak. "Well done, Chips," he cried; and those three words, coming from the Old Man, meant more than a volume of praise from someone less exacting.

For the first time since leaving her home port, three

months before, the *Hersilia* rode at anchor. True, she was safe for the time being; but sailing out again into the open ocean could be as hazardous a feat as the one she had just accomplished. And it flashed through Nat Palmer's mind that no navigator but a sealer would have dreamed of carrying his vessel into such a place. It was an accepted part of the sealer's calling to attempt channels and passages where few others would have dared to venture. St. Martin's Cove was almost entirely landlocked. The gales which came howling over the summits of Hermite broke their backs on the jagged, snow-covered peaks. There was a wide, gradually ascending beach of shale, ideal for careening the brig. There her cargo could be lightered, her hull repaired.

"We'll warp her ashore on the flood," the Old Man was saying. "There's no time to lose. The sooner we show our taffrail to Hermite, the better I'll like it."

With the backbreaking toil of pumping ship behind them, all hands set cheerfully to work. Before night-fall the brig was secured by cables run out to the rocks, so that she stood upright on her keel, high and dry when the tide receded. A meal that was almost a feast rewarded the weary men who—their bellies filled for once—fell into their bunks to sleep the sleep of the just and the dead.

By noon of the following day, all cargo had been carried ashore. Empty casks were lashed under the brig's hull as pontoons. At flood tide, the *Hersilia* was floated well up on the beach, and the business of locating the leak was begun at once. When all copper had

been stripped off the hull, it was discovered that one of the wood ends around the sternpost had worked open. This had opened a seam through which a stream of water constantly poured, each hour rendering the leak more dangerous by raising the planking from its curvature. It was doubtful if the *Hersilia* could have remained afloat for another twenty-four hours. A new wood end must be butt-bolted, seams caulked, the copper replaced—a job requiring a full three days.

While the brig's repairs were being effected, Nat Palmer asked for and received permission to take the only surviving lifeboat and sail across the fifteen miles of water separating Hermite from Horn Island.

Choosing Stan Bendick and Nils Erikson for companions, Nat stocked the boat with a three days' supply of food and water. Before embarking from Hermite, he took noon observations for latitude; carrying two good sextants, a chronometer and a theodolite, he was determined to make observations of Horn Island as accurate as weather conditions would permit. Reliable sights and soundings of that almost unknown region were rare, and only the sketchiest of charts was available.

Since at most seasons of the year Horn Island was unapproachable except from the northeast, few men had ever set foot on its inhospitable shore. The very thought of so doing quickened Nat's pulse. As far back as he could remember, he had heard his father, Uncle Alex and Old Zenas speak of Cape Horn with awe and respect. Wherever old sailors gathered to swap

yarns, the Horn was a byword to unlock the floodgates of memory. Although Uncle Alex had rounded that southernmost sentinel a score of times, he had never laid eye on it; nor had Zenas. For throughout most of the year, that region lay enshrouded in fogs and vapors.

What an epic was its history! From the moment when Balboa, climbing a peak in Darien, beheld the vast expanse of the Pacific rolling away and away before his wondering eyes, it was inevitable that men should seek a route into those unfurrowed seas. Magellan had had the vision to steer south and discover the straits which bear his name, thus for the first time finding a route from the Atlantic Ocean into the Pacific. The daring English navigators—Drake and Cavendish—followed in his wake. But the cluster of sharp-toothed islands at the tip of the continent at that time never had been heard of. Not until 1615 did two Dutch navigators—Schouten and Le Maire—reaching the Straits of Magellan stand boldly on farther south. It was they who discovered Staten Land; and passing between it and the mainland, through Le Maire Strait, they rounded the southernmost point of the continent and entered the empty wastes of the Pacific. That final tip of land they called the Hoorn, after their home town in Holland.

Something of this pageant of history crowded through Nat Palmer's mind as he and his two companions, in a 22-foot boat, sailed down upon that historic landmark. They would be among the first of men to go ashore there.

It seemed as if nature that morning had conspired to smile upon the adventurers; for though high swells were running, a fair breeze on the starboard quarter drove the lifeboat at a smart clip.

Some five miles long, Horn Island rose precipitately from the sea, more than a thousand feet high, filling the three spectators with wonder. Toward sundown, they beached their small craft with little difficulty on the northeast shore, hauled it up safely beyond the sea's reach, and settled down for the night. Though this shore was protected from the winds of the Great Southern Ocean, the air was bitingly cold, and all three took turns throughout the night, replenishing a roaring fire.

At daybreak they began their ascent of the formidable peak. No grass or mosses grew on that barren rock; the only fresh water was rain which had gathered in clefts and basins. A less hospitable place could scarcely be imagined. Slipping, sliding, falling frequently, the three companions fought their way up the rocky slopes. By the time the sun was high enough to take observations, they were near the summit and exactly in its meridian; and there Nat took two sets of sights and a round of angles.

After a last steep ascent of several hundred feet, the top of Cape Horn was reached. A wild wind, against whose pressure they were forced to lean, greeted them with a rush and a roar—a chilling wind blown unhampered from the ice fields far to the south. A magnificent panorama lay spread out before them. To the right lay the broad Pacific, to the left the Atlantic.

Fifty miles to the southwest, the stormbound isles of Diego Ramirez could be seen faintly on the horizon—the unbeaconed graveyard of many a ship. Behind the summit of Horn Island loomed range after jagged range of mountain peaks—Tierra del Fuego, Wollaston, Deceit, Herschell, Hermite and Hall island off its eastern end—now veiled in driving rain, now glistening with sunshafts, all as remote as castoff meteors hurled through space.

Stan Bendick was dancing with excitement, but for several moments Nat Palmer and Nils Erikson stood mute before the spectacle that confronted them. Then the Swede was saying: “In my country ve vould call this *Ultima Thule*.”

And Nat agreed. “It is the world’s end, and that’s for certain!”

Satisfactory sets of circummeridional altitudes were obtained with the sextants; a round of angles, compass bearings for the variation, and good afternoon sights for time, completed Nat’s success.

Reluctantly they all turned away to retrace their steps, aware that they had witnessed a scene it would be given to few men on earth to behold.

That night, by the light of a blistering bonfire, Nat marked an observation in the small book he kept for that purpose:

Cape Horn Island— $55^{\circ} 59' S.$, $67^{\circ} 12' W.$



chapter 9

THE SHINING ISLAND

THREE WEEKS LATER, the *Hersilia* raised the Falkland Islands and dropped anchor off Shallop Cove. Seen from the sea, the islands (of which there were said to be more than two hundred) were low and uninviting to the eye. But closer acquaintance reversed that impression, for here was fresh water in abundance, wild duck, the upland geese and plover. Penguin rookeries covered acres of ground. Shallop Cove abounded in round clams, shellfish and limpets. Peat moss made excellent fuel for cooking. Berries of all sorts grew profusely, while the roots of the tussock grass that covered

the land were found to be as tasty and nourishing as chestnuts.

More important, cattle, horses and sheep—wild descendants of the animals left by the French settlers who had abandoned the islands half a century earlier—roamed the grassy hills. Here was food in abundance, enough to provision a fleet of ships against the longest voyage.

But of the fur seals and elephant seals which the *Hersilia* had traveled half around the world to find, there was no evidence: their extermination had been complete. Captain Sheffield stalked the headlands, sweeping the seas with his glass, but never a seal swam within the circle of his search.

“Mr. Palmer,” he remarked one morning, “I am going to leave you here in the Falklands, with a couple of men of your choosing, while I sail south to hunt for an unspoiled rookery. It may be only a fool’s errand, but I have no choice. During my absence, you and your men will kill cattle and salt down the beef. Also, I am informed that the eggs of the penguin will keep fresh for months if they are first immersed in oil, then coopered up in casks of sand. You will attend to this matter also. By the time I return, I shall expect to see additional supplies to last for some months.”

“You may count on me, sir,” Nat assured him, happy at the prospect of spending some days ashore.

He discovered that Stan and Erikson were only too glad to join forces with him once again; and the week following the *Hersilia*’s departure found them all occu-

pied from dawn to dusk. Hunting the wild cattle was child's play, for the animals showed no fear of man, and their curiosity proved to be their downfall.

This was the season when the penguins were beginning to lay their eggs, and their rookeries covered many acres of land. So closely were the birds packed together, nest upon nest, that Nat and his companions had difficulty in walking among them. It was necessary to push and kick them out of the way; nor were the birds backward on their part. They returned this rude treatment with a constant play of their sharp beaks, frequently inflicting such a powerful nip as to draw blood. A blow from their flail-like wings, moreover, could be extremely painful.

The species of penguin known as macaroni (rock hopper)—whose eggs were considered to be the best—was a bird about sixteen inches high, with a tuft of varicolored feathers on each side of its head. In its walk, or rather march, it carried itself as erect as a soldier. Nat never tired of watching the way in which the macaronies approached the shore after a spell of feeding at sea. They always chose a spot where the surf broke directly against the rocks. Swimming together in columns of many hundreds, within thirty feet of their landing they dove quickly, then shot up out of the surf with such velocity as to land perfectly erect upon the rocks. Immediately after landing, they formed ranks in Indian file and divided into distinct bodies, each division having its own leader, whom they followed in their pompous march back to the rookery.

Day after day the work went on. A thousand pounds of prime beef were butchered and salted down. Five hundred penguin eggs received a coating of oil before being coopered up in sand-filled casks. But one afternoon the routine of labor was enlivened by the surprising appearance of a ship—the first vessel encountered in over three months. A brig, flying the British flag, came to anchor in Shallop Cove. Her captain was rowed ashore in a pinnace, where Nat Palmer met him at the beach.

“Captain Tennant,” the stranger introduced himself, “brig *Espritu Santo* out of Buenos Aires.”

“Second mate Palmer, brig *Hersilia*, at your service,” came Nat’s answer. “Like ourselves, you’re doubtless here for beef and water, sir? My men and I will be glad to assist you.”

“You are more than kind,” the Englishman replied. “I gather there is an abundance of fodder here?”

“Enough and to spare.”

The course of the next few days saw a friendship spring up between the British captain and Nat Palmer. The young American’s willingness to place himself at the stranger’s disposal had won the Englishman’s confidence. Where, in the beginning, Captain Tennant had seemed to be somewhat evasive, he was now forthright and outspoken about the purpose of his voyage. His objective, Tennant declared, was the South Shetland Islands.

“The South Shetlands?” Nat echoed, mystified. “I can’t say that I ever heard of them.”

The Britisher's lean face broke into a grin. "That is in no way surprising, young man," he retorted, "since the islands were discovered only two years ago!"

Nat pricked up his ears. "Who discovered them and where do they lie?" he demanded, bluntly.

The Englishman retreated behind a mysterious smile. "A compatriot of mine—William Smith, master of the brig *William*—was blown off course on a passage between the River Plate and Valparaiso. Eventually he made a landfall—a group of islands that are marked on no existing map except my own! In my belief they are the land sighted by Schouten two hundred years ago!"

"The Lost Auroras," Nat gasped, scarcely daring to believe what he heard. "Then they weren't just a myth! They really exist?"

"They do indeed." Captain Tennant was enjoying himself hugely. "You will pardon me, of course, for withholding the bearings of the islands?"

It was Nat's turn to smile. "That means fur seals, I reckon," he said.

"Precisely," the other agreed. "Striking an unspoiled rookery of seals is like striking gold: a man doesn't give away his luck."

"Fair enough," Nat answered. His mind went soaring ahead on the wings of this revelation: a discovery of new islands meant, almost certainly, a wealth of seals and elephant oil. What wouldn't he give to know the bearings of the South Shetland Islands—the Lost Auroras!

When, after tarrying for several days, the British ship was ready for departure, her commander shook Nat Palmer's hand warmly. "I am sorry to have returned your kindness with secrecy," Tennant said, "but you know the custom among sealers."

"Perhaps we shall meet again," Nat assured him; "in the near future, I hope."

The other laughed. "That's not likely, young man. May fair winds speed you back to America."

When the *Espritu Santo* weighed anchor and stood out to sea, Nat and his two companions climbed to the highest vantage point in the island. As long as the British ship remained within the focus of his spyglass, Nat plotted every tack she made; then, setting down his observations, computed the course that she might be taking. Inasmuch as the brig *William*, which had discovered the South Shetlands, had been driven off course on a passage between the River Plate and Valparaiso, Nat Palmer believed he could locate the elusive islands from his knowledge of the winds of that region, and from the direction in which the *Espritu Santo* was now sailing.

The next day Captain Sheffield returned to the Falklands, without once having sighted land. Nat's computations by that time were complete. Sheffield was quickly fired by his second mate's enthusiasm, and together they went over Nat's figures, working out the English ship's possible destination.

"By St. George!" the Old Man exclaimed. "I believe

you're right, mister. Unless I'm off soundings we'll track down that Englishman! Who knows? There may be seals enough to go around for all!"

A course south-southwest was laid. With the wind on the port quarter, the brig weighed anchor and pointed her bowsprit into the unknown. Here were seas rolling up from the Antarctic ice fields, with nothing to oppose their weight and fury. At times the giant waves, towering like cliffs above the brig's quarter-deck, robbed the main tops'l for a few seconds of wind, while the stern sank deep into the trough of the sea. At such moments not even the hardiest helmsman would have cast a backward glance at the avalanche poised behind him, about to topple in a thousand tons of water.

The wind had turned bitterly cold, with flurries of snow. There came the first blink of ice reflected on the lower clouds—one of the two "signs" for which sealers always looked: "iceblink" and "water sky." A sky with "iceblink" meant a hard, white appearance near the horizon, indicating the proximity of snow-covered land. A "water sky" was a dark patch, suggesting open water below the horizon.

Before long the ice itself appeared in the form of drifting bergs, and the brig soon was surrounded by them. Many of the icebergs were undercut, and it was in this that danger lay. A ship, drifting against the undercut side might, with the fall of the swell, be caught beneath the overhang and, at the succeeding rise, be swamped or overturned. During the summer months,

moreover, the bergs often were in a state of decay, their monstrous pinnacles about to topple. The slightest shock might bring them down—hundreds of tons in weight. And suddenly, surrounded by icebergs tacking on the wind, Nat Palmer thought of Old Zenas. His mind flashed back to an afternoon, as if it were yesterday, when the old man was saying: "In my belief such masses of ice are broken off from lands of great extent. . . ." Could Old Zenas have been right? Was there, still farther south, some great land—*Terra Australis*—which no man had ever seen?

Notwithstanding the dangers surrounding them, the entire ship's company was held in thrall at the wild splendor of the scene. There were colonies of penguins on many of the floes. The sea also was alive with these birds, and they came swimming fearlessly toward the ship, uttering cries that sounded like *cl-a-ak! cl-a-ak!* Thousands of other sea birds tailed in the brig's wake, all indicating the proximity of land.

Close beside the ship, in the underwater gloom, a serpentlike form could be seen; a smooth, evil head that appeared to be half cat and half snake rose from the water. It looked right and left, opened its ugly mouth and hissed. This was a leopard seal, hunting. The leopard seal and the killer whale were at all times to be feared, the most ruthless and predatory denizens of the Southern Ocean.

Until now only a few killer whales had been seen; but as the *Hersilia* drove deeper into the south, the ocean seemed to come alive with them. They were

much smaller than other varieties of the true whale; but their immense jaws and wide gullet could accommodate not only whale food but seals and penguins. The old shellbacks asserted that the killer could (and often did) chop a man in two with one snap of its powerful jaws. There was something sinister and terrible about those tigers of the sea. Erikson declared that it was dangerous for a man to cross leads of young ice if killers were about, for, by charging up from below, they were able to break through ice of considerable thickness.

The appearance of ice had a wonderfully settling effect upon the sea, deadening all but the heavier swells. Now, too, at the beginning of November, the lengthening days were a great help to the Antarctic navigator. Up until the first of March there would scarcely be any nightfall. Even at midnight it would not be wholly dark.

Mirages were common in that strange upside-down world of the Antarctic. Nat Palmer never forgot the first one he saw there: a number of enormous icebergs floating high above the horizon in a sky of purest gold, while all about them swam pods of huge, spouting whales. Even as he watched, the vision dissolved so quickly he could scarcely believe what he had seen.

The fourth day, after leaving the Falkland Islands, was crowned with reward.

“Land ho!” sang the lookout. “Land ho-o-o!”

Men sprang into the rigging, peering eagerly at the horizon. Yes, there could be no doubt about it: there

was a lofty range of black-and-white mountains which must be the westernmost of the islands that Nat Palmer would have to learn to call "South Shetlands." The brig tacked warily into a blackened sea slashed with plumes of white and draped with veils of fog. Snow fields clothed the heights of the island in white armor. All along the coast were glaciers—immobilized streams pouring down from the upper snows.

The Lost Auroras! Nat Palmer's heart thumped. How much better a name than "South Shetlands!" He felt almost as if he himself had discovered this shining island.

The Old Man was scanning the shore line with his spyglass. Suddenly a shout escaped him. He handed the glass to Nat. "See what you make of it, mister."

Nat swung the glass slowly from port to starboard; then his heart gave a great leap, for rising above a low spit of rock were two mastheads crossed by royal and t'gallant yards. The hull of the ship itself, lying at anchor in some unseen harbor, was screened from view by a low-lying headland.

"The *Espiritu Santo*!" he exulted, his pulse racing. So his computations had been correct! What sort of reception would the Englishmen give them, Americans—intruders in what was a discovery of great value?

But when, two hours later, the *Hersilia* had worked her way through the beetling cliffs that guarded the harbor, and dropped anchor a cable's length from the *Espiritu Santo*, Captain Tennant himself came aboard the American ship.

The Englishman's hand was outstretched in welcome, albeit his face wore a somewhat rueful smile. "Since we have fallen together, we'd best make fair weather of what can't be helped," he said. "We'll work in company."

"That's generous of you indeed," the Old Man acknowledged. "I take it there are plenty of seals here, Captain?"

Tennant smiled broadly. "More skins than a thousand ships could ever take home!"

Old Zenas had once made the same statement in almost the same words.

"I have named this landfall Deception Island," the Englishman was saying. "You can readily see it was once a volcano, which has sunk. The crater makes a magnificent harbor. The cliffs through which you passed have been christened Neptune's Bellows."

The volcano which formed Deception Island was not yet quite extinct, so that inside the harbor there was a sulphurous stench, and steam drifted continually above the beach. The black sand and the shallows of the water were warm. Much of the land surrounding the harbor was warm also, since no snow remained for long upon its surface.

"You will want to see the seals," Captain Tennant was saying. "Come, I shall show you!"

The slopes surrounding the harbor, though rocky and broken, were by no means difficult to ascend. The height of the barrier above sea level was scarcely more than a hundred feet, and, when the summit had been

reached, an involuntary exclamation burst from all hands. On the ocean side of the island, a shore stretched away mile after mile into the mist-covered north. There thousands upon thousands of seals lay on the rocks, basking in the wan Antarctic sun. Nearly every known species of the larger seals was among them. In addition there were elephant seals, in numbers beyond computing—huge, clumsy, fierce-looking and revolting creatures. They came and went in legions, waddling to the margin of the rocks and tumbling into the sea, or clambering grotesquely ashore to revel in the pallid warmth.

The unimaginable numbers of the animals stunned the imagination, and for a moment no one spoke.

Then the Old Man exclaimed: "Here is famous picking indeed! Three months' work will fill the brig and we can be off before the equinox."

But Nat Palmer, lost in the reality of what confronted him, scarcely heard the captain's words. Here he was, standing on the shores of the Lost Auroras, and it was just as he had imagined it might be, during those boyhood years of daydreaming. The ice-sheathed pinnacles that formed the backbone of the island, the fog-veiled crater, the clouds of sea birds wheeling above the kelp-covered rocks, and the seething legions of the seals—it was all just as he had dreamed it. Its cold and flashing splendor filled him with a strange exhilaration.



chapter 10

SEALERS IN ACTION

No DELAY was allowed to interfere with the purpose of the sealers—the objective that had drawn them ten thousand miles from home to this remote and unknown land. Every man understood the necessity of filling the brig's hold with sealskins and elephant oil before the brief Antarctic summer reached an end. Woe unto any ship that tarried past that time limit! Once frozen fast within the ice, the ribs of the stoutest vessel would be crushed as relentlessly as a toy in the grip of a giant. Such a catastrophe would set men afoot on the pack ice, thousands of miles from any possible help. Hence, time was the very essence of success or failure in a sealing venture.

Then, too, all hands were anxious to receive the stipend for which they had signed so many months ago. Sealers, like whalers, did not ship their crews for wages in money. In a sealing voyage, so much depended on every man's willingness to work to the limits of endurance, that all hands were given a direct share in the profits. This division was known as a "lay." Each man received so many parts of a hundred, according to his rank, experience and qualifications. The ship's owner himself (in this case Edmund Fanning) was paid for his risk and expenditures in the same way, the vessel and its outfitting usually taking some two-thirds of the returns. Officers and crew received proportionate shares of the balance.

The tryworks for the seal oil was set up in the waist of the *Hersilia*. At the same time, Chips and his helpers whacked into shape on shore a commodious barracks, where the men would eat and sleep in shifts. This was a timesaver, since it eliminated going to and coming from the brig. A capacious box stove was set up in one corner of the barracks, but this would be useless until the tryworks was in operation, when "scraps" from the seal oil could be used for fuel. For the South Shetlands were treeless, and even driftwood never reached this inhospitable shore.

In the days to come, the men from Stonington would discover that although this was the warmest season of the Antarctic year, the sun never swung very low without leaving a penetrating chill in the air. The quixotic

winds of the region could vary from the lightest zephyr to a gale of hurricane force within the hour, always carrying a breath of ice from the unknown wastes to the south. Periods of storms, with heavy swell and grinding ice floe, alternated with periods of calm, when fog settled in a dense pall which—even in summer—formed heavy rime on the *Hersilia*'s running gear.

With several members of his watch, Nat Palmer was detailed to the slaughter of elephant seals, while Mr. Hazard—with four men of his own watch—would hunt down the fur seals. The rest of the hands, including Chips and the sailmaker, Cooky and the Old Man himself, would be occupied at the tryworks—mincing and flensing the blubber, coopering the oil. For the next three months there would be no rest for any man.

In the vernacular of sealmen, the offspring of bull and cow elephant seals were known as "pups." Thousands of these pups had been born a month or two before the *Hersilia*'s arrival. The hunters found great numbers of these engaging little animals lying everywhere upon the rocks, sometimes piled up two or three deep, like so many sausages. And so unafraid were they of strangers, that Nat and his men could move among them freely. With velvety coats and lambent eyes they were singularly appealing, offering no objection to being patted or even tickled. Among themselves, however, they were apt to be quarrelsome, beginning to train early in life for those life-or-death combats which would take place when they were fully grown.

Remembering the wholesale slaughter that had fished

out the waters of the Falkland Islands, exterminating seals and whales alike, Nat tried to dissuade Captain Sheffield from his intention of killing the pups as well as the adult animals. His words fell upon unresponsive ears.

"A seal is a seal," the Old Man stated flatly, "and oil is oil. We're here to fill the hold of this ship and be away before winter sets in. No animal is to be spared, including the pups. Those are my orders, mister."

The men, thinking greedily of the lay, looked forward eagerly to this business of large-scale killing. To them, as to the Old Man, a seal was a seal, be it cow, bull or pup. Each man was armed with a heavy club as long as an oar; and each wore in a scabbard at his belt a curved butcher's blade, as well as a sharp-pointed knife. The nose of the elephant seal was its most vulnerable spot. Several blows, delivered accurately and with sufficient weight, would render the seal unconscious. Then the main arteries of the neck must be severed, the blood fountained off—for only clear blubber would yield the clear oil so highly prized in the civilized world. Care must be taken not to destroy the animal's brain, since this was considered a table delicacy. The boiled tongue of the elephant seal, moreover, was a favorite with sealers; but for eating purposes the rest of the flesh belonged in the same category as that of penguins: it was revolting.

Nat Palmer never forgot that first day of his adventures as a sealer. There was something almost awe-inspiring in the sight of those thousands upon thousands

of sea mammals lying in careless abandon on the beach, mindlessly unaware of the holocaust so soon to overtake them. As the lifeboat hauled up on the shingle, two yearling pups turned their soft, wondering eyes upon the intruders. Their mouths opened in a half yawn, but made no sound until Soroff—obeying that primitive impulse which prompts some men to torment the helpless—threw a stone and hit one on the head. Then both pups threw up their heads and gave forth a plaintive bark that sounded like *ack-ack-ack!*

The six men spread out along the beach, each armed with his heavy club. All hands were tingling with excitement; for while the young pups had no objection to being patted, no one could afford to take liberties with the older animals. Even the cows had been known to kill a man, while the bulls—twenty to thirty feet long—could lope along a rocky beach faster than a man could run. An enraged elephant seal could be a formidable adversary. Despite the animal's great size and seeming clumsiness, it could move with agility and strike a crushing blow with its huge canines.

At this season of the Antarctic year, however, the animals were inclined to be sluggish to the point of sloth. Sleeping appeared to be their principal concern. As Nat and his fellows moved freely among them, the seals scarcely roused from their mindless, dreamless slumber. Gummy tears ran down their whiskered faces. The bodies of the bulls were covered with scars won in combat; their nostrils opened wide and then shut as they breathed noisily. Some were breathing through one

nostril only, after the fashion of their kind; and their slumber seemed a species of nightmare punctuated by groans and sighs and belches.

"Come on, men," Nat cried tersely, "there's work to be done!"

Singling out a huge bull, he dealt a blow with stunning force upon the brute's nose. Instantly the slumbering mass of animals became an uproar. Erikson, Stan Bendick and the other men were laying about them right and left with thudding blows. Nat's bull had reared up on its foreflippers, its snout blown out in fine fury as it opened its mouth to roar. Each time it was struck it jerked up its head, roared again and gave ground, moving back a step on its flippers. Sometimes the beast refused momentarily to budge, holding its attitude of bewildered rage. But always in the end it retreated. A good dozen blows at its vulnerable point were needed before the great animal sank its head down on the rocky shore. Instantly Nat sprang forward to sever the carotid artery. The brute he had killed was a vast, scarred, mangy old warrior—survivor of many battles. Looking down at his victim, Nat felt no glow of pride in what, at best, had turned into a somewhat one-sided combat.

Stan Bendick, meanwhile, had his hands full with one of the bulls that had burst through the tussock grass bordering the beach. The animal was making a cumbrous dash for the sea, but Stan had already placed himself between the enraged bull and the water. At a blow from Stan's club, the elephant seal reared up to

full height, roaring defiance, bewildered but unafraid of this strange assailant whom his myopic eyes could scarcely see. The boy slipped suddenly on a wet rock, and for a second it seemed that he would surely be killed by the monstrous brute towering above him. But Erikson sprang to Stan's assistance, dealing the animal a powerful blow with every ounce of strength behind it. The elephant seal collapsed like a great, limp sack. Cows and yearling pups, close to the scene of combat, opened their mouths to protest; but those animals as yet undisturbed returned to their slothful slumber.

When a dozen or more elephant seals had been dispatched, the business of skinning them must begin before rigor mortis set in. The hide was slit lengthwise down the middle of the back. Then with swift, sure strokes, another cut was made behind the head and one in front of the tail flippers. Erikson, who was an old hand at sealing, knew every trick of the trade, and the other men watched him eagerly for their cue.

When the hide had been removed, some eight inches of white blubber remained. This blubber was stripped away from the underlying muscle and cut into square "blanket pieces." Then the animal was rolled over and the underside treated in the same manner. It was the hardest kind of physical labor, needing four men to work a single carcass.

As the hours dwindled, knives and hands grew crimson. The men paused only to strop their knives on hones attached to their belts. Throughout the whole slaughtering process, the knives were whetted so continuously

that the ring of steel on steel rang like a savage counter-point to some primitive rhythm.

Erikson, glancing up from the scene of carnage, gave a great laugh. "Much blood!" he cried.

Seventy-nine elephant seals were killed before that first day ended. Beside each corpse lay a pile of blubber. The men straightened up to ease their weary muscles. Bespattered with red from head to foot, they set about cutting a hole in each strip of blubber, through which a wooden toggle was then passed. The toggles were strung on a length of rope known as a "sling." The sling in turn was attached to a rope that led out to the anchored brig.

Strip after strip of blubber were secured by the toggles to the sling, by the sling to the rope line, and finally by the rope line to the waiting brig. From the shore, waving his arms in semicircular arcs, Nat Palmer gave the prearranged signal that the blubber was ready to be hauled aboard. Presently the rattle of the capstan could be heard, and slowly the length of line from ship to shore grew taut. The first heap of blubber began to move toward the water, then the second and the third. Before another hour had passed, the rocky beach was empty of the first day's plunder. Weary men staggered off to snatch such rest as they might at the barracks.

This was the moment for which the black-backed gulls and brown skua gulls had been waiting. With raucous screeches, they descended like vultures upon the pile of bloody carcasses lying abandoned on the beach. With wings outstretched and cries of rage, they

drove one another away as they worried the black seal meat off the bones. At last, gorged to the full, they waddled to the water's edge and floated there, too heavy with their meal to rise in flight.

Day after day, week after week, with unabated zeal the holocaust continued. Erikson's shout of triumph—“*Hoi-yah! Hoi-yah!*”—as he drove home a deadly blow, became a sound as familiar as the high-pitched *ack-ack-ack* of the seals. With every day's end, the rocky beaches were strewn with carcasses upon which legions of vultures continued to gorge themselves, and the decks of the *Hersilia* were piled high with blubber for the try-pots.

Upon Nat Palmer, this indiscriminate slaughter had a depressing effect. At the rate the animals were now being killed, within a few years they would be extinct. True, oil was needed to light the lamps of civilization; but it was the waste involved that depressed the young American from Stonington: the carcasses rotting on the shores, the ever-growing piles of bleaching bones—all this that men might add their profits by the light of the seal's guttering oil. And ruefully to himself Nat admitted that he could not avoid a slightly sick feeling when killing anything warm and full of the life God gave it. He had never, he knew now, been cut out for a sealer!

Meanwhile, the Britishers of the *Espritu Santo*, were keeping pace with the Americans. An intense rivalry had sprung up between the two camps. Men vied

fiercely with one another to see who could kill in a single day the greatest number of animals. The Englishmen, having arrived at Deception Island some days ahead of the Americans, saw their ship ride deeper with her cargo. And so the captain of the *Hersilia* drove his own men relentlessly. A great day it was for the Old Man when his hunters, within a period of 14 hours, killed 83 elephant seals and brought all the blubber to the vessel before twilight.

Day after day, entries in the *Hersilia*'s log read thus:

December 4	76 elephant seals killed today—oil coopered
December 5	81 elephants killed
December 6	79 elephants killed—oil coopered 27 bales fur sealskins sent aboard. Men exhausted but must take advantage of long daylight. Four hrs sleep per man sufficient.

There was an old saying among sealers that a cask of blubber equaled a cask of oil. Actually, some oil was lost between shore and ship; but, to Captain Sheffield's delight, it was established that 200 gallons of blubber yielded 180 gallons of oil, coopered and stowed in the brig's lower tier.

Small wonder that the Old Man's stern face these days was wreathed in smiles! If all went well, James P. Sheffield would return to Stonington a rich man. He would build for himself a fine white house with a gambrel roof, like those of the prosperous merchants

he had so long envied. He would retire from the sea, to watch other men assume the dangers and responsibilities of command. His wife, moreover, would have a coach-and-pair as fine as Mrs. Ed Fanning's, and he would arrange suitable marriages for his five daughters. What did it matter to him if a rare and extraordinary form of life was being exterminated in Antarctica? Let those who came after the *Hersilia* worry about that!

And so the general carnage continued, dyeing the beaches crimson, and the reek of blood became an abomination to all but the toughest and most callous hands.

Meanwhile, other shore parties were raiding the penguin rookeries for eggs, hundreds of which were put down in sand for the homeward voyage. Nor were other birds of the South Shetlands spared by the marauders. The Old Man had issued muskets to several of his men, and the hunters returned in the evening, staggering under the weight of their trophies—many kinds of ducks, the upland geese, edible birds that never had been seen before by man and so were nameless.

Sometimes in the small hours before dawn, in that half-light which passed for night, Nat Palmer tossed uneasily in his bunk. At such moments it seemed that he and his fellows were demons of destruction, beyond any legitimate excuse. Possibly it was the slaughter of the appealing and defenseless pups that most sickened him; but there were times when he longed to be back in Stonington, in his father's shipyard—building rather than destroying. Often in the night he heard the bell-

like piping of the whalebirds—a call that had become as familiar to his ears as the katydids and whippoorwills of home, a sound that added to his growing restlessness.

Late one afternoon, weary of the slaughter on the beach and of his own part played in it, he turned his back on the scene and walked inland. From the heights above, a fresh-water stream tumbled through the tussock, leaping and singing over sparkling stones, sometimes cascading in a sheer drop of many feet. The topmost peaks of Deception Island glistened in their eternal armor of ice, as unattainable as a mirage. The wind was chill, but, by the time Nat had gained the summit of the ridge, he was hot and sweating. From the beach below, now muted by distance, he could hear Erikson's triumphant "*Hoi-yah!*" and the indignant *ack-ack* of the tormented seals.

There came a sudden whir of beating wings as some feathered creature, sharp of claw and beak, rushed at the intruder and soared away. Instinctively Nat threw up one arm to protect his eyes. A second bird, then a score of them swooped down at him, and in the moment of actual attack swept upward again and vanished; but not before Nat had seen the raking talons, the wicked beak, the sharp, bright eyes. Here were the fierce and predatory skuas, guarding their nesting grounds. There were thousands of them scattered over the ridge on which he stood: big brown birds with malevolent eyes.

Nat waved his arms to warn the skuas away, more scared of them than they were of him. Sealers regarded the skuas with the same vindictiveness they reserved

for sharks at sea; for the birds were scavengers and freebooters, wreaking havoc in penguin rookeries, robbing nests of eggs and chicks. Flailing his arms to protect his head, Nat climbed still higher up the cliffs overlooking the sea, only too glad to leave behind him the nesting grounds of the hawklike birds.

Looking back at the distance he had come, he could see the *Hersilia* and the *Espiritu Santo* far below in the harbor—toy ships afloat in an immense black basin. The barracks, too, had dwindled to the size of a snuffbox. The sealers themselves, like figures seen through the wrong end of a telescope, resembled ants scurrying about their senseless errands. The harbor was black within the white arms that embraced it, and the floating islands glittered like cut glass.

Facing south, the vast plain of the Great Southern Ocean seemed to stretch to infinity beneath a sky of overcast, through which the sun was struggling to burst. Flurries of snow whipped up out of nowhere, to form whirlpools that vanished into thin air. And then, as Nat stood gazing so fixedly into the mist-en-shrouded south, a miracle occurred—the wind tore a rift in the clouds, through which a band of light, bright-minted as gold, poured down upon the frozen sea. And there, sparkling in the sunlight, a tremendous reach of ice-covered land lay revealed. It stretched away and away—remote, magnificent, scarcely to be believed: cliffs, headlands, towering mountains at whose feet a sea, locked in ice, lay motionless. Almost at once the

clouds closed ranks again, obscuring the vision, leaving Nat Palmer curiously shaken.

So swift, so unexpected had been the revelation, that he scarcely dared to believe the evidence of his eyes. Strange sights were commonplace here at the bottom of the world; and yet, and yet . . . A conviction fixed itself slowly in Nat's mind that what he had beheld was no mirage. It was another land—a continent, perhaps—vaster than any yet known: the *Terra Australis* of which for centuries men had been dreaming.

As he retraced his steps, down through the nesting grounds of the skuas, the boy from Stonington felt curiously lightheaded, as one who knows not if he be dreaming or awake. He would speak to no one of what he had seen. But someday, he vowed fervently, someday he would find out. *He must know!*

By the end of February, the *Espiritu Santo*—riding deep with a full cargo—laid a course for England. Two weeks later, when the first flash-freezes heralded the approach of Antarctic winter, the *Hersilia*, too, weighed anchor. She carried 10,000 prime fur sealskins and 500 casks of finest elephant oil.



chapter 11

WHITE CONTINENT

THE RETURN of the *Hersilia* to Stonington, after an absence of almost one year and laden with a rich cargo, created a sensation that spread like wildfire along the New England coast. In the success of Ed Fanning's venture, men saw a whole new era of trade and prosperity opening up. The fact that the skins were of exceptional beauty was almost as exciting as the number of seals slain.

The brig's cargo was promptly sold at auction. Those who had invested in shares settled their accounts. The sealskins brought \$2 apiece, or \$20,000 for the cargo—eight times the original cost of the expedition. The

elephant oil brought another \$10,000. Young Nat's share was 1 in 35, or 280 skins which sold for \$560. From the oil he received another \$250. This was considered a splendid return for any young man on a voyage of ten months.

Wherever men gathered—in countinghouse, tavern or village square—the new sealing grounds were the only topic of speculation. Nor did the story of Nat Palmer's cleverness in outguessing the British captain lose luster in the telling. Big Nat Palmer's boy, smart as they come! Yes siree, you couldn't beat a Yankee skipper!

Even if James Sheffield had tried to keep secret the bearings of the newly discovered islands, he could not have silenced every member of his crew. Before a week was out, a number of his foremasthands, whose tongues had been loosened by grog, were babbling freely about the *Hersilia*'s voyage, telling wondrous tales of the immense number of seals still to be slaughtered for gold.

The Government of that day had no powers to enforce control over natural resources; every shipowner had a right to engage in wholesale plunder of the seal rookeries. The fact that glutting the market with skins and oil would drive prices downward rather than up was disregarded. Moreover, few men concerned themselves with the fact that extermination of the seals would put an end to one of the most lucrative trades of New England. Merchants and seamen alike were concerned only with their immediate profit.

It was a foregone conclusion that the men of the

Espritu Santo, returning to England, would spread word of the new discovery in Antarctic waters. Undoubtedly, British merchants already were outfitting fleets on their own account. It would be but a matter of months before the ships of other nations would have joined in the race for plunder.

Several of Stonington's leading citizens, again headed by Edmund Fanning, pooled their interests to outfit a fleet that would set sail as soon as possible for the new sealing grounds. This new venture was an ambitious one. The fleet would include five brigs and two schooners—vessels designed to meet the special circumstances confronting sealers. The hazards of the Southern Ocean were great for ships of any size; and as a special precaution it was decided to make use of a small, shallow-draught sloop, which could scout ahead of the larger vessels and maintain contact with them. Such a craft must be small enough to approach dangerous coasts and negotiate narrow passages that larger ships dared not attempt. It must also be swift enough to follow the migrations of the seal herds and so discover new rookeries. But above all, it must be seaworthy enough to make the perilous, 10,000-mile voyage from the coast of New England to the South Shetland Islands.

Upon the man who captained such a craft would depend the success of the entire expedition. Where, demanded the merchants of Stonington, could such a ship and such a man be found?

"I have the answer, gentlemen," Ed Fanning assured his colleagues. "The sloop has already left Big Nat

Palmer's yards. He built her for that boy of his: 'Little Nat,' we used to call him. But 'pon my soul, he'll top his pa by three inches if he doesn't soon stop growing!"

"Big Nat Palmer's boy, eh? No better sailor ever wrung salt water out of his socks." Such was the general opinion.

"The sloop," Fanning went on, "is a 47-footer with a 17-foot beam. Made of white oak and rock maple. Big Nat never turned out a neater craft. With that boy of his at the tiller, she'll sail like a witch!"

In this manner the new flotilla was chosen. Captain Benjamin Pendleton would serve as commodore, with young Nat Palmer as pilot-scout.

Meanwhile, Nat had laid a course for home. There his mother and sisters made much of him, plying him with the tidbits and sweets that had been his favorites as a boy. But a diet of salt horse, of seal meat and penguin, had blunted Nat's appetite for pastries. With poorly concealed impatience, he marked time until he could decently leave for the shipyard, to see for himself the sloop about which he had already heard so much.

He found the *Hero* riding at anchor in the harbor. His eyes raced over her in admiration, missing no detail of her clean lines, her polished mast and spars, her gleaming brightwork. A gilded sea lion, carved by Old Zenas, formed the figurehead.

"There she is, son," his father said proudly. "These

yards have never turned out a finer piece of work. Your own command! What do you think of her?"

Young Nat swallowed, hard. "She'll do," he said.

"Ed Fanning wants you to sail her south, son—to lead the fleet that's outfitting. You won't refuse?"

Nat grinned. "I thought you knew me better than that!"

That same afternoon he climbed the path leading to Old Zenas Coffin's shed. Sea gulls still used the weathered shingles as a rookery; the sperm whale's lower jawbone still leaned against the clapboards. Nothing had changed.

"Zenas!" Nat shouted. "I'm home again! Where in tarnation are you?"

At sight of his visitor, the old man flung down mallet and gouging chisel, came stumping on his peg leg and puffing like a grampus.

"Weary winds!" the old man cried. "Ye're a sight fer sore eyes!" He gripped young Nat fiercely by the shoulders and stared up into his face. "By the powers, ye go out a boy and ye come back a man. A six-footer, I'll be bound."

"You're off soundings, Zenas," Nat grinned. "I'm two inches over that."

"We'll not quarrel over a couple o' inches, lad. And so ye found the Lost Auroras? And right where I told ye they'd be!"

"An Englishman got there first, worse luck."

"Mebbe so," the old sailor conceded, "but ye out-

witted him, didn't ye? One Yankee skipper is worth two o' King's men any week o' Sundays. And have ye heard that Dick Loper's come back from Chiny? And Phineas Wilcox made home port last week from the Pacific?"

"I've heard," Nat told him. "They're shipping with me in the *Hero*."

"Then ye've signed 'em already?"

Nat laughed. "I haven't clapped an eye on 'em yet. But they'll go!"

It was a foregone conclusion that the three boys would sail together for the Antarctic. Phineas Wilcox, barely twenty-one, had grown into a six-footer of powerful build. Dick Loper, though slighter, was as tough as smoked hickory. For the third member of his crew, Nat chose Stan Bendick, now fifteen years of age—the greenstick farm boy who had grown into a splendid sailor. To complete the complement, Nat chose Peter Harvey, the Negro boy from Philadelphia, who had served as bosun in Uncle Alex's *Spindrift*, during the trying months of the blockade. A more reliable foremasthand could not be found.

With such a craft, with such a crew, Big Nat Palmer's boy was well on the way to glory!

The logbook of the sloop *Hero* has found its way from Antarctica to Washington's Library of Congress, where it may be seen today. At first glance it looks like any ordinary blankbook, not unlike an old-fashioned

diary. Its yellowed pages measure 8 by 13 inches. Ruled lines at the top of each page afford space to enter the date, ship's course, weather, latitude and longitude. Down the depth of the pages, lines are ruled and numbered for every hour of the day, to accommodate such observations as the young skipper wished to make.

A canvas cover, stitched sailor-fashion, preserved Nat's log against the sea's searching damps. A pen-and-ink sketch of a two-masted schooner adorns the inside back cover: a sprightly rendition of the schooner *Express*, of the South Shetland sealing fleet, heeled smartly over to a spanking breeze. Presumably it is the handiwork of the boy from Stonington.

Nat's handwriting is clear and well-formed, easily deciphered, except where the ink has flaked and faded. The spelling is remarkably correct for a boy whose principal schooling was the sea. But this unpretentious notebook is miles removed from other monotonous records of its kind; for it relates, in the tersest of language, events leading to the discovery of a continent—the world's last great land mass.

Under the date of August 1, 1820, the logbook's first entry reads:

Commences with fair weather, with breeze from W S W. At 6 P M made Block Island. Bore by compass N N W 1/2 W distant about four leagues, from which I take my departure. Course S E by E.

Actually, it was two days earlier than this, on July 30, 1820, that the entire sealing fleet set sail from

Stonington, bound for the Antarctic. Favored by fine weather, which held true even through the notorious latitudes of the Roaring Forties, all the vessels managed to keep company as far as the Falkland Islands. From there, within a week, they were picking their way cautiously among the first icebergs of the Great Southern Ocean.

Throughout the voyage, the *Hero*—as Ed Fanning had predicted—sailed like a witch with Big Nat Palmer's boy at the tiller. Broad and shallow in proportion to her length, with her gunwales only a foot above water when in port, she was ideally adapted for sheltered and smooth waters, for exploring the uncharted islands to which she was bound; but just as surely was such a hull dangerous on the open ocean. For if the *Hero* should fall off broadside into a trough of the sea, a wave catching her under the counter would instantly turn her bottom-up, and one more vessel would be listed as “fate unknown.”

For years shallow-draught sloops had been used along the inland waterways of New England to carry on the traffic of the land. But such sloops—especially those employed on the Hudson River—often were three or four times the tonnage of the *Hero*. Nat Palmer's historic voyage proved that a craft of such diminutive size could face up to such a formidable challenge; but it is doubtful if, under guidance less skilful than his own, the *Hero* could have survived. The best day's run of the passage was 175 miles—a notable achievement for any 47-foot sloop. In the boisterous winds and

waves of the southern seas, such a performance was phenomenal.

By October 12, Deception Island was raised by the lookout of the fleet's flagship; and when the Stonington sealers dropped anchor in the spacious harbor, not another vessel of foreign nationality was to be seen. The Yankees "had got there first."

But the previous year's slaughter already was showing its effects, for the seals were not coming ashore in the tremendous numbers of the preceding season. It was soon apparent to Commodore Pendleton that the herds would not furnish sufficient skins to reward his entire fleet. He therefore assigned Captain Nat to the business of searching out other rookeries.

The *Hero* sailed forth at 2 o'clock in the afternoon of October 15. Her logbook states matter-of-factly:

Stood over for Ragged Island, course E for the north head. At 8, being close in with the land, tacked offshore for the night.

Thick snowstorm. At 12, double-reefed the mainsail and tacked to the east. At 5, made the land and stood to southward. Saw what we thought to be a harbor. Lowered boat and examined it, but were disappointed. Stood along to southward. Saw an opening—stood in.

Found it to be a spacious harbor with very deep water—50 to 60 fathoms. Got out the boat to sound. Found anchorage about a mile and a half from the mouth. Went on shore and got some eggs. Ends with thick weather and calm.

In other words, the 47-foot sloop was adrift throughout the night upon an unexplored sea. Presumably the thick snowstorm referred to cut off visibility in all directions, while the wind was of such force as to necessitate double-reefing the mainsail; and it is reasonable to suppose that threatening icebergs were afloat on every quarter. If, however, the hazards and discomforts of such a predicament worried the young skipper, no trace of anxiety found its way into the pages of his logbook, or caused his meticulous handwriting to waver.

In cruising about to the north, Nat was rewarded by discovering several rich seal rookeries; but in an attempt to run through a narrow, twisting strait, he had the unforgettable experience of grounding on an unsuspected reef. Fortunately the tide was rising and the *Hero* soon floated free. At that same moment, Nat discovered a sulphur-bottom whale heading boldly up into the strait, the leviathan's course revealing to the young skipper the direction of the true channel.

For the first time in days, Nat Palmer let out a great laugh. "There's our course, mates!" he cried. "Where a whale can go, we can follow."

On October 24, the *Hero* returned to Deception Island, bearing welcome tidings of the new rookeries, which soon enough would be plundered and depleted. The ensuing days again were occupied in carrying supplies to the camps on shore, and bringing back to the expectant ships the skins of slaughtered seals. Already the number taken by the fleet exceeded fifty thousand, and, with the newly discovered rookeries, there was no

end in sight. The carnage which Nat had found so repellent on his previous voyage was moving ahead in full tide, this time backed by the hunters not of a single ship but of an entire fleet. Extermination of the remaining herds became a foregone conclusion.

By early November, the first of the British ships had begun to arrive, among them Captain Tennant's brig *Espiritu Santo*. They were soon followed by a fleet of Dutch schooners, and then by a score of Scandinavian sealers. The race for plunder was in full cry.

During the seemingly endless routine of carrying supplies back and forth, Nat and his youthful crew worked the clock around. They snatched sleep in cat naps. For days on end, they thought nothing of a twenty-hour stint. These boys were young, tough, resilient, almost inexhaustible. But sometimes at the day's end, the young skipper from Stonington found himself too weary to write up the *Hero*'s log in shipshape fashion.

Occasionally there were no entries at all; and Nat Palmer rejoiced when he again received orders to sail on another exploring expedition, this time directly south into the unknown. The remembrance still plagued his waking hours of that vision, so briefly revealed, of a shining vista of land. Through all the months that had elapsed since he had first seen it, that vision burned in Nat's memory, brighter than a flame, stranger than a legend. To the other members of his crew—to Phineas, Dick, Stan Bendick, and Peter Harvey—the young skipper had confided his secret. The other boys were as eager as their captain to sail into the south, where

no ship except Captain Cook's had ever dared to venture. For Nat, Phineas and Dick, it was like reliving their early days together on Long Island Sound: that day they had sailed Uncle Alex's *Spindrift* from New York to Providence, each taking turns at the tiller and handling all sail; or that first time they had laid a course for Fisher's Island, with no grownups aboard to tell them when to make sail or when to take soundings!

"I know the pranks this part of the world can play on a man's eyesight," Nat was explaining. "I've seen mirages by the score, but if ever I saw *land*—an immense and mighty land—it was that day I stood on the heights of Deception Island and looked south!"

"Golly," Phineas Wilcox chuckled, "what wouldn't Old Zenas give to be with us now?"

"He'd give his peg leg, that's what!" Dick Loper answered. "Zenas believed in the South Shetlands long before that Britisher—whatever his name is—stumbled on the islands. Who knows? The old buzzard may be right about icebergs breaking off from lands of great extent."

"I believe Zenas *was* right," Nat said warmly. "Anyway, let's find out, once for all! What do you say?"

"Aye!" Phineas shouted, just as he had done years before when Hardy's squadron flung its blockade across the sound. "Let's go!"

Thus the *Hero* set out once more upon what was to become a momentous voyage. Past island after island, eluding treacherous currents, sometimes slipping by a hairbreadth from under the toppling overhang of

mountainous icebergs, the cockleshell sloop picked her perilous way. Lessons in seamanship learned long ago from Uncle Alex, time and again came to Nat's salvation. He accomplished the incredible, charting and exploring the difficult bays and straits of the islands encountered. In a craft whose tonnage was comparable to the smallest ship of Christopher Columbus' fleet, Nat and his boys headed into seas as unknown and far more perilous than any that Columbus ever was called upon to face. Day and night alert, in fog or gale, the doughty crew managed to outwit the elements which sought to destroy them, and every hour promised a new threat, a fresh challenge, a more exciting adventure.

Sailing conditions scarcely could have been worse. For almost a week there was no break in the overcast. Snow and sleet and ice made working the ship an ever-increasing hazard. It had become impossible to take sights, and the *Hero's* position was uncertain.

"Nat," Phineas suggested reluctantly, one gray and dismal morning, "don't you think we've given this chance enough? The land you thought you sighted—surely we've sailed far enough to bump into it—if it were there. Maybe—maybe it was just a mirage—"

For a moment the young skipper stood silent. Nat was aware that every passing hour increased the danger to his ship and to his shipmates. Perhaps his "vision" had justified his right to risk his own life in search of a new continent, but did it give him the right to jeopardize the lives of others?

"We'll stand on till tomorrow," he answered, de-

spondently. "After that—if we don't sight land—we'll head back for Deception. Perhaps what I saw *was* a mirage after all." Nat could not wholly believe it, but his heart was heavy within him.

It is upon such decisions, seemingly so inconsequential, that life swings in new directions. Had Nat Palmer decided to turn back at that very hour instead of waiting for another day, the miracle never would have repeated itself.

Late that afternoon, as the sun circled around and around behind a shroud of fog, the overcast suddenly was rent aside, as a veil might be torn to shreds by an impatient hand. And there, revealed again just as Nat remembered it, lay a mighty white continent, never to be believed, and yet surely there—ice-covered pinnacles, snowy plains, immense glaciers floating above a green-black sea.

"Nat!" shouted Phineas, his voice going up the scale. "There it is—look! It's real! You were right! You *did* see land!"

"Log me for a lubber!" Dick Loper crowed. "It's no mirage. It *is* land!"

"By golly, whoever would have believed it?"

The five boys, goggle-eyed, clung to the ice-caked rigging, struggling to maintain balance on the slippery deck. The overwhelming vision of land, floating above an ice-strewn stretch of water, held them in thrall. For the space of a long moment, no one of them uttered another word. The peaks of tremendous mountains, armored in eternal ice, sloped away into mysterious,

mist-covered distances—a most desolate spectacle; and yet, as the Antarctic sun flashed across it and the air was filled with the beating wings of thousands upon thousands of gray-and-black petrels, it had a chilling, flashing grandeur of its own.

The *Hero* came about off the mouth of a channel choked with tremendous bergs, because her skipper deemed it imprudent to venture in. Perhaps Nat's hands trembled a trifle as he shot the sun, for his calculations failed to agree with those of Phineas. After a second attempt, however, both boys agreed on the sights, and Nat recorded the latitude as $63^{\circ} 25' S.$ The longitude as $57^{\circ} 55' W.$

On that 18th day of November, a twenty-one-year-old youth stepped into immortality.

"We have found land, yes," the young skipper acknowledged. "Land no one has ever seen before. But what we're supposed to locate, m'lads, is seals, and I don't see hide nor hair of the critters. So what good is that fine and mighty land to us?"

Three days later, on the return to Deception Island, the *Hero* lay hove to in a dense fog among icebergs. At half-past midnight Nat came on deck as Dick Loper struck 1 bell. Almost at once there came an answering chime. In the half-dark, Dick's face assumed a comic mask of surprise.

"Whatever was that?" the boy demanded, startled.

"An echo thrown back from an iceberg," Nat suggested. "What else do you think it could be?"

"I dunno. Sort of weird, though."

But when at 1 o'clock Dick struck 2 bells, the same eerie response again was evoked. And the strange fact about the phenomenon, if it were an echo, was that the answering bell seemed to be almost a half tone higher than the pitch of the *Hero*'s bell.

At every half hour throughout the long night, the mysterious response returned—uncanny and disturbing even to these hardened seafarers. Sometimes there was enough variation in the speed of the response to render doubtful the theory of an echo.

At 8 bells, or 4 o'clock in the morning, Phineas Wilcox came on deck to stand his watch. "I don't understand it, Nat," he muttered, uneasily. "This echo makes me creepy, that's what it does. Thank the Lord we haven't got a Russian-Finn aboard."

"Listen!" Nat cried suddenly, gripping the other's arm. "Do you hear *that*? Oarlocks!"

Sure enough—through the fog came the plop and drip of oars, the complaint of locks, and presently the sound of human voices speaking in a foreign tongue. As the fog cleared, the mystery of the bells was resolved; for off the *Hero*'s starboard bow a warlike frigate could be seen—its white belt and black gun ports clearly discernible. On the port quarter lay a business-like sloop of war; and as the fogs swirled still higher, flying from the masthead of both ships, the imperial colors of the most distant empire in the world streamed on an icy wind—Russia.

A ship's cutter, full-manned and under command of

an officer in resplendent uniform, shot up under the *Hero*'s counter. The heavily bearded officer who stepped over the sloop's low gunwale touched his hat in salute to the young skipper from Stonington.

In heavily accented English the stranger stated: "I am Lieutenant Vassily Leontovitch, of His Imperial Majesty's frigate *Vostok*."

Standing straight and foresquare in his worn sealskin jacket, Nat Palmer faced his distinguished visitor. The flaps of Nat's fur cap hung down like the ears of a cocker spaniel. The boy gave an answering salute—awkward, yet with a dignity of its own.

"A pleasure, Lieutenant," Nat said. "In what way may I be of service?"

The other bowed slightly. "My commander, Admiral Bellingshausen, requests the honor of your presence aboard His Imperial Majesty's frigate."

"At your service, sir."

Awaiting them in the warship's great cabin, Nat Palmer and Phineas Wilcox found a group of Russian officers in dress uniform. The commander arose and introduced himself in excellent English.

"I am Admiral Faddei Faddeyevitch Bellingshausen," the man said. "Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Nat Palmer of Stonington, Connecticut," came the brief answer. "Sloop *Hero*. This is Phineas Wilcox, first mate."

"Stonington?" the admiral murmured. "This name is strange to me. Perhaps it is a great city?"

Nat permitted himself his rare smile. "Scarcely that, Admiral," he answered. "It's the home port of our sealing fleet. We are now at work among the islands here."

"And the name of these islands?"

"South Shetlands, sir—discovered by the British a couple of years back."

"You have found seals in great numbers?"

"Yes, but already they are on the decline," came Nat's answer. "Captain Tennant's fleet alone has killed forty thousand. The kill of the Stonington fleet exceeds that number. What the Scandinavians and the Dutch have managed to do, I know not. If a single seal exists in these waters thirty years hence, I shall be surprised."

Bellingshausen nodded thoughtfully. "The old, old story," he murmured, "the greed of man."

"And what, sir, may I ask, is your own mission here?" Nat demanded.

"An official exploring expedition for Tsar Alexander," was the admiral's reply. "But come, let us be seated! A glass of spirits, perhaps, to chase from your bones the chill of this accursed region! Even worse than Siberia is this Antarctic climate."

It soon transpired that the Russian admiral had sailed from Europe two years before the *Hersilia* had returned to Stonington and its crew had revealed to the world the existence of the South Shetland Islands. These men from another world could scarcely believe that five American boys, in a cockleshell of a boat,

could have negotiated waters difficult even for warships of His Imperial Majesty. Their surprise turned to wonder as Nat related briefly his discovery of the new continent. And if it proved to be disconcerting for a distinguished forty-year-old admiral to have a youth of twenty-one volunteer his services as pilot, Bellingshausen managed to conceal his chagrin.

“Perhaps,” the man suggested, “you will allow me to study your observations, Captain Palmer, and such charts as you may have made?”

“I brought them with me!” came the ready reply. “Here they are—”

When logbook and charts had been spread on the table, Bellingshausen and his officers studied them intently. And so impressed was the admiral by the exactitude and accuracy of Nat’s survey, that he came to his feet and held out his hand in honest admiration.

“I must surrender the palm of enterprise to you young Americans!” Bellingshausen exclaimed. “In a boat scarcely larger than the launch of my frigate, you have discovered land that I, for three long years, have sought in vain to add to the crown of His Imperial Majesty, Tsar Alexander. What shall I say to my master? What will he think of me? No matter. My misfortune is your good luck. You have accomplished the impossible!”

The admiral raised his glass high in the gesture of a toast. His fellow officers sprang to their feet, their own glasses upraised.

“In the name of yourself, Captain Palmer,” Bellings-

hausen cried, "I christen this land of your discovery *Palmer Land*. Wear your laurels proudly, boy!"

That night, in the *Hero*'s tiny after cabin, the boy from Stonington opened the logbook at a fresh page. At last he would have time to write up the events of the past several days. In the starboard bunk, Phineas Wilcox lay stretched out in sleep; in the port bunk, Dick Loper was lost in a world of dreams.

Nat Palmer dipped quill in ink, stared thoughtfully for a moment into space. Then with firm clear strokes he wrote:

November 18, 1820. Discovered a strait trending S S W, filled with ice. Thought it imprudent to venture in. Bore away to Northard. Saw the shore everywhere perpendicular.

Like most men of action, young Nat Palmer was sparing of words. Besides, he was looking for seals, not continents. For seal oil, not glory.

A SEAGOING GLOSSARY

Aback. A vessel becomes unmanageable (is taken *aback*) when a shift of wind strikes the sails from the side opposite that to which they are trimmed.

Abeam. Bearing at right angles to the side of the ship.

About. To *come about* is to pass from one tack to another.

Ahoy! A survival of the war cry of the ancient Vikings.

All Standing. Fully clothed.

Aloft. Above the deck; upon the masts or spars.

Amidships. Halfway between bow and stern.

A-Taunto. Pronounced a-tanto. From the French *autant*, to the full. Originally this meant with masts and spars aloft fully rigged.

Athwartship. Across, from side to side.

Aweigh. Of the anchor, off the bottom; in process of being *weighed*.

Aye, Aye, Sir! The acknowledgment of a superior officer's order.

Back. The wind *backs* when it changes counterclockwise, but *veers* when it changes clockwise.

Backstays. Ropes abaft the shrouds, which support the strain on the mast.

Beam. The width of a ship's hull.

Bight. The middle section of a rope; a bend in a coast.

Binnacle. The compass stand and lamp.

Block. Nautical term for a pulley.

Bluenose. A native of the Maritime Provinces of Canada, particularly Nova Scotians.

Boatswain. Pronounced bo'sun. A petty officer.

Boom. A spar used to extend the bottom of a sail.

Bowsprit. The spar projecting forward from the bow.

Brace. A rope controlling the swing of the yards on a square-rigged ship.

Braced-Up. A square-rigged ship is said to be *braced-up* when her yards are on the backstays to a wind before the beam.

Brail. A rope fastened to the leech or corner of a sail, by which the sail may be hauled up preparatory to furling.

Brightwork. Polished brass or copper fittings.

Bunt. The middle part of a square sail, or the part of a furled sail that is gathered up in a roll at the center of the yard.

Cable's Length. Roughly, 100 fathoms.

Cape, the. Cape of Good Hope, or Cape Cod, according to context; never Cape Horn. *See Horn, the.*

Cape Horn Snorter. A heavy gale typical of the Horn region.

Capstan. Pronounced caps'n. A mechanical device used to operate the windlass in weighing anchor, and for other heavy jobs.

Careen. From the French word *caréner*; to heel over or list.

Carry Away. To break suddenly, as a rope or spar.

Cathead. A short, projecting balk of timber which serves to suspend the anchor above the bows.

Catted. Term used when an anchor is made fast to the cathead.

Chafing Gear. A covering for a rope or spar, to protect it from chafe.

Chandler. A dealer in ships' supplies.

Chantey. Pronounced shanty, and sometimes spelled shantey. From the French *chanter*: to sing. A sailor's work song.

Chips. A nautical nickname for the ship's carpenter.

Chronometer. An instrument for measuring time.

Claw Off. To beat off a lee shore.

Clew Up. To haul up the corners of sails, preparatory to furling.

Close-Hauled. Sailing as nearly as possible into the wind.

Colza Oil. A vegetable oil formerly used in binnacle lights.

Conn, to. To watch the course of a vessel.

Cooper. To stow, or put down in casks.

Courses. The foresail, mainsail and crossjack.

Crab Winch. A mechanical apparatus for raising or hauling heavy weights.

Crossjack. Pronounced cro'jik. The lower square yard of the mizzenmast.

Crosstrees. Two horizontal crosspieces of timber at a masthead, which spread the upper shrouds in order to support the mast.

Cutwater. Where the stem of a ship enters and *cuts* the sea.

Davits. A kind of crane projecting over the side of a ship, for hoisting smallboats.

Davy Jones's Locker. The bottom of the ocean, where everything goes that is thrown overboard, including the bodies of dead sailors.

Dogwatch. The time between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m., divided into periods of two hours each.

Doldrums. The calm, sultry latitudes lying between the northeast and southeast trade winds of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Douse. Sailor's slang, meaning to extinguish.

Draught. The depth of water drawn by a ship.

Duff. A boiled or steamed pudding, usually served on Sundays at sea.

Earing. A line used to fasten the upper corners of a sail to a yard or gaff.

Ease Off. To steer less closely into the wind.

Ebb. The outgoing tide.

Even Keel. Meaning steady, or in equilibrium.

Fall. The tackle used in lowering or hoisting a ship's boats to or from the davits.

Fathom. Six feet.

Figurehead. A carved figure at a ship's bow.

Fill Away. To keep away from the wind until the sails are full and drawing.

Fish-Chowder Sailor. One who fears to sail out of sight of land.

Flemish Coil. A flat coil of rope with the end in the center and the turns lying against each other.

Flensing. To strip the blubber from a whale or seal.

Forecastle. Pronounced foc'sle. The raised structure in a ship's bows; the crew's quarters.

Frigate. A cruising vessel (warship) mounting 24 to 34 guns, normally carrying its main battery on a single deck.

Full and By. A square-rigged vessel is said to be sailing *full and by* when she is being steered on a wind with her canvas full.

Futtock Shrouds. A contraction of "foot hooks"; for the toes must be hooked around the ratlines in order to go around them.

Gaff. The spar at the head of a sail.

Galleon. A type of sailing ship developed in Europe during the 16th century.

Galley. A ship's kitchen.

Gantline. A line rove through a block, as at a bowsprit end, for hoisting rigging.

Garnet. A tackle, usually rigged on the mainstay.

Gasket. A line used to lash securely a furled sail.

Grampus. A cetacean allied to the blackfish, but having teeth in the lower jaw only.

Grog. A sailor's daily ration of rum mixed with water.

Gun Port. A square hole in a ship's side, through which a gun may be fired.

Gunwale. Pronounced gun'l. The capping piece on the bulwark at the top of the ship's side.

Hand. A man before the mast; a common sailor.

Handsomely. A nautical term meaning slowly, carefully.

Handspike. A rounded length of hard wood with one end squared off; used by seamen for heaving lashings tight.

Harbor Furl. An extra-neat finish in furling sail.

Hardtack. Ship's biscuit.

Hard Up. With the rudder over as far as it can go, so that nothing further can be done.

Harness Cask. A receptacle of teakwood or mahogany, in which salt beef or pork are kept soaking in brine.

Harpoon. A whaleman's (or sealer's) harping iron, with which whale or seal are *ironed* by the *harpooneer*.

Hawsepipe. An opening in a ship's bows, on either side of the stem, through which the anchor chains may pass.

Hawser. A stout rope for hauling or mooring.

Headreaching. A square-rigged vessel is said to be *head-reaching* when shortened down to lower tops'l's and lower stays'l's, with her yards braced sharp-up on either tack.

Head Wind. A wind which will not permit a ship to sail her course.

Heave To. To bring a ship up into the wind so that she lies almost stopped in the water.

Heel. A ship *heels* when she leans over from the pressure of the wind in her sails.

Helm. The tiller or wheel by which the rudder is controlled.

Holystone. A rough stone the size of a large Bible, for scouring the decks.

Horn, the. Cape Horn; to the Britisher, Cape Stiff.

Hull. The body of a ship.

Iceblink. A white streak in the sky near the horizon, caused by the reflection of light from an area of ice.

Jackstay. A rod stretching along a yard of a vessel, to which the sails are fastened.

Jack-Tar. A shore nickname for men before the mast, seldom used by seamen themselves; "every man jack" means "all hands."

Jacob's Ladder. A rope or wire ladder with wooden or iron rungs.

Jaw-Tackle. Nautical slang. "Clap a stop on your *jaw tackle!*" In other words, "Shut up!"

Jib. A triangular sail set on a stay from the head of the foremast to the bowsprit.

Jib Boom. A spar or boom which serves as an extension of the bowsprit.

Keel. The long timber at the bottom of the hull which supports the ribs.

Keelson. Pronounced kilson. One of the keel's timbers. The phrase "from truck to *keelson*" means "from top to bottom."

Knot. The nautical mile, when reckoned in terms of miles per hour. A ship sails so many *knots* (not miles!) per hour.

Landlubber. A sailor's name for a landsman at sea, particularly one who is seasick or awkward.

Latitude. The position of a location with reference to its distance north or south of the equator.

Lee. The opposite of *weather*; the side away from the wind.

Lee Shore. A coast upon which the wind is driving the ship.

Leeward. Pronounced *loo'ard*. The side opposite to the direction from which the wind blows.

Lighter. A shallow-draught boat used for loading or unloading vessels not lying at wharves.

Log. An instrument for measuring the speed of a ship.

Longitude. The position of a location with reference to its distance east or west of the prime meridian through Greenwich, England.

Luff. To bring a ship's head nearer to the wind; the opposite of *bear away*.

Lunar. To take a *lunar*, in navigation, is to take a sight on the moon instead of the usual noon observation of the sun's altitude.

Mainmast. The second mast from the bow.

Mainsail. Pronounced *mains'l*. The principal sail on the mainmast; also in square rig called the *main course*.

Marlinspike. A sharp-pointed metal or wooden spike, used by seamen for opening the strands when splicing rope.

Mermaid. A fabled creature, half woman and half fish, found in the folklore of all lands; firmly believed in by sailors up until the 19th century.

Mizzenmast. The aftermost mast in a two- or three-masted vessel.

Moor. To secure a vessel so that she is unable to swing with tide or current.

Mother Carey's Chickens. Sailor's name for the sea birds known as stormy petrels; believed to bring bad luck.

Mud Hook. Slang for the anchor.

Narwhal. An Arctic cetacean with a single, long pointed tusk projecting from the upper jaw.

Off and On. A ship tacking toward and away from the land, waiting for daylight or a favorable tide.

Offing. Distance from the land.

Outhaul. A rope used for hauling out a sail upon a spar.

Palm and Needle. A sailor's tools for sewing sailcloth; the palm is a bone or metal thimble set in a leather hand-strap; sail needles are very sharp and three-sided.

Pay Off. To let a ship fall off from the wind.

Poop. The raised structure of the deck aft, beneath which are the captain's and officers' quarters.

Pooped. A running ship overtaken by a following sea.

Ratlines. Lines running across the shrouds, serving the same purpose as the rungs of a ladder.

Reckoning. Calculation of the ship's position. *Dead Reckoning*: when unable to get sight on sun, moon or stars, the mariner sails by *dead reckoning*—that is, by estimating the ship's speed and the direction taken. *Dead* probably comes from the abbreviation *ded.*, meaning *deduced*.

Reef. To reduce the exposed area of a sail; also hidden and submerged rocks.

Reeve. Passing a rope's end through a block; the past tense is *rove*.

Ring Rope. A chain used in securing the anchor to the cathead.

Roaring Forties. A region of heavy winter gales in the North Atlantic, lying roughly between the 40th and 50th parallels of latitude.

Rope. There is an old nautical saying that "there are only seven ropes in a ship." Wherever possible, the word *line* is preferred on shipboard.

Rope Yarn. The yarn or thread composing the strands of a rope.

Sail Loft. A large open room where sails are manufactured alongshore.

Sails. Aside from referring to a vessel's canvas, *Sails* is the nautical nickname given to the sailmaker; corresponding to *Chips* for the carpenter, and *Lamps* for the lamp trimmer.

Salt Horse. Salt beef—in the old days a sailor's staple of diet.

Schooner. A fore-and-aft-rigged vessel with two or more masts.

Scrimshander-Work. A British variation of *scrimshaw*.

Scrimshaw. A sailor's handiwork, carved in wood or bone.

Scuppers. Outlets through the bulwarks for water from the deck.

Scurvy. A disease due to vitamin deficiency; in olden times the plague of long voyages.

Scuttle. A hatch cover with a lid sliding in grooves; when used as a verb, it means to sink a ship by drilling holes in the bottom.

Sea. In nautical terms only ships, never men, *put* to sea; a man *goes* to sea, or *follows* the sea as a career.

Sea Legs. A man's ability when walking to compensate for the vessel's motion.

Sextant. An instrument to ascertain latitude and longitude.

Sheave. Pronounced shiv. The moving part of a block or pulley.

Sheet. A line made fast to the lower corners of a square sail, or to the after corner of a fore-and-aft sail.

Shellback. A seasoned old sailor; a slang term implying that the *shellback* is growing barnacles from having been so long at sea.

Ship. Originally this term meant a three-masted, square-rigged vessel, as opposed to a brig, brigantine, schooner, sloop, etc. Currently it is used to describe almost any kind of vessel that floats. Incidentally, one sails *in* a ship, never *on* it. There is mutiny *in* a ship—*Mutiny on the Bounty* notwithstanding!

Ship's Biscuit. Hardtack, a hard cracker.

Sights. An observation of sun, moon or stars, taken to calculate a ship's position at sea.

Sloop. A fore-and-aft-rigged vessel with a headsail jib.

Soundings. Water shallow enough so that the bottom may be found (*sounded*) with the lead line.

Spanker. The gaff sail set in the stern of a square-rigged ship.

Spar. A mast, boom or yard—any sort of wooden pole used in the rigging of a ship.

Square Away. To bring the yards at right angles to the keel and let the ship run before the wind.

Square Sail. Originally square in shape, a sail which sets below a yard and is equally balanced on either side of the mast.

Starboard. The right-hand side of a ship, facing the bow.

Stay. A general term for any piece of standing rigging.

Staysail. Pronounced stays'l. A triangular sail set in a stay between the masts.

Stem. The center piece in the bow's construction; the expression “from *stem* to *stern*” means “from front to back.”

Sternpost. The upright timber rising from the keel, upon which the stern is constructed.

Studding Sail. Pronounced *stuns'l.* A narrow, temporary sail set at the outer edges of a square sail to take advantage of a light breeze.

Tack. The lower weather corner of a sail and the rope by which it is handled; both are called *tacks*.

Tack, to. To sail at an angle to the wind, as opposed to receiving the wind dead astern or dead ahead.

Taffrail. The rail around a ship's stern.

Tar. A preservative for wood, rope or canvas; a word often identified with seamen: a *tar*, a *jack-tar*.

Tiller. A steering bar attached to the rudderpost, formerly used on all types of vessel, now replaced by a wheel on all except small craft.

Topgallant Sail. Pronounced *t'gans'l.* The sail set above the tops'l in a square-rigged ship.

Top Hamper. Upper yards and rigging.

Trades, the. The northeast and southeast trade winds; belts of steady winds, of great assistance to the navigator.

Trick. A two-hour spell at the wheel.

Truck. The cap on top of the masthead.

Tryworks. A brick furnace built on deck, in which try-pots are placed, to boil down blubber and convert it into oil.

Turk's-Head. A fancy knot of turbanlike form, worked on a rope.

Vessel. Any craft larger than a boat.

Waist. The main deck, between foc'sle and quarter-deck.

Warping. Moving a vessel by hauling on a line.

Watch. A crew is divided into two *watches*, the starboard being called the *captain's watch*, and officered by the second mate; the *port watch* being headed by the mate (as the first mate is known).

Ways. The track down which a vessel slides into the water at launching.

Weather. On shipboard this is the side facing the wind, as opposed to the *lee*—that is, away from the wind.

Weigh. From the Anglo-Saxon *woegh*: to lift an anchor off the bottom. A vessel is said to be *under weigh* from the moment her anchor is off the bottom, even though she may have no *way* on her; that is, be in motion.

Windward. Pronounced wind'ard. The direction from which the wind blows.

Yard. The spar to which a square sail is secured.

Yardarm. One extremity of a yard.

Yaw. To steer wildly, become almost unmanageable.